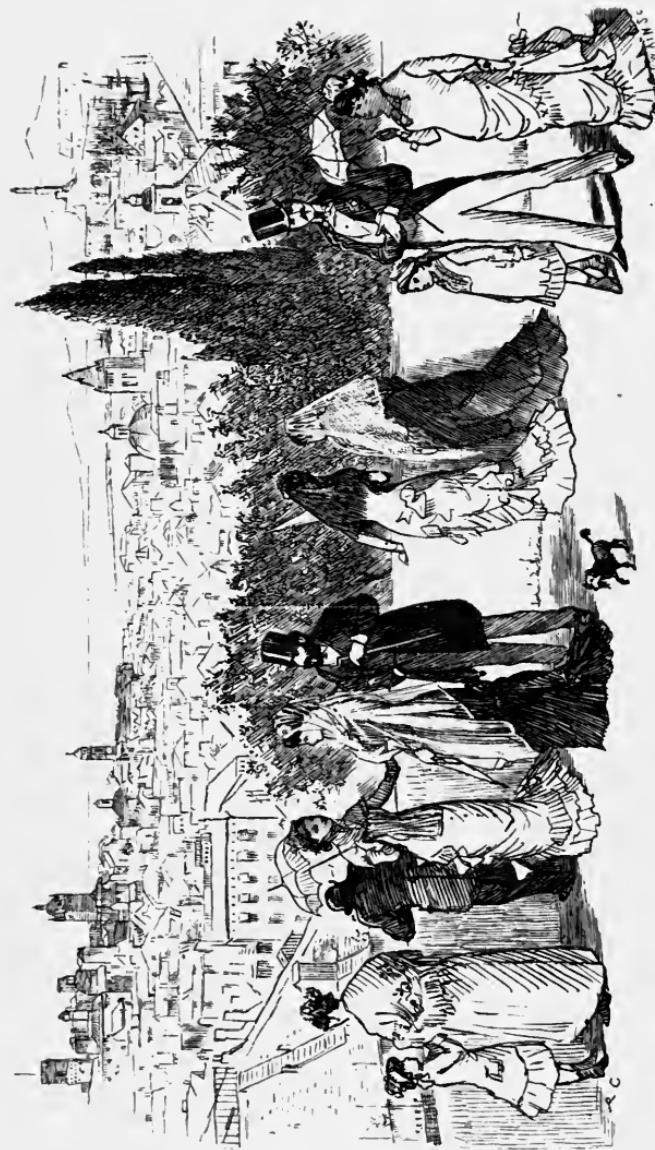


# NORTH ITALIAN FOLK

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*View of Genoa, from the Terrace of the Acquasola.*

# NORTH ITALIAN FOLK

*Sketches of Town and Country Life*

BY

MRS COMYNS CARR



*ILLUSTRATED BY RANDOLPH CALDECOTT*

Lond<sup>n</sup>on

CHATTO AND WINDUS, PICCADILLY

1878

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## P R E F A C E.

ITALY—about which so much has been written—political, geographical, social, pontifical, poetical—Italy is my theme. But not the Italy of popes and priests and controversies, of civic struggles and new kingdoms, nor the Italy of tourists or guide-books, of fame and fashion, nor even the Italy of art and artists. The folk about whom my gossip shall be are folk who, living or dead, have made the best part of Italy these many years gone by. They are those who, unwittingly, inherit most of the poetry for which their nation, long ago, won its fame ; on them—innocent of lore and reading though they, most of them, be—has fallen something that recalls the great names of their own great men of the past. They are of the people.

To them rather than to others in the land belong the freedom and freshness, the grace and good-heartedness, the frank honesty that finds a place even beside worldly-wise prudence, the simple and courteous dignity which the educated classes have not always been able to maintain. No one who has lived long beside them could have failed to learn the grace of their ways, the humour of their rustic simplicity; no one who has grown up in their midst could ever forget their pleasant faces and quaint enthusiasms, their friendly greetings, their frank speech and emphatic opinions.

I, who thus learned to know them in days gone by, can, at all events, never so forget; and I am fain now to set down some memory of those sun-lit scenes of the past, for friends whose lot has never been cast, as mine was, among them. My sketches will not always be portraits of living people or existing things, but they will always be sketches of things or friends that have been: recollections vignetted in the past, rather than photographs

taken on the spot. And so, if anyone should discover aught that is inaccurate towards the present, let him go back a space upon the steps of time and live away fifteen years beside the country housekeeper or *la Pettinatrice*, in the Signor Prevosto's company or with the village sempstress. For to these will I go for a verdict, and to these—not my *readers*, because they will not read what I have written, but my staunch supporters always—to the people of the Riviera and the Apennines I now dedicate 'North Italian Folk.'

ALICE CARR.

6

# C O N T E N T S.

## Part One.

### *ON THE RIVIERA.*

|   | PAGE |
|---|------|
| GENOA . . . . .   | 3    |
| MARTEDÌ GRASSO ( <i>Shrove Tuesday</i> ) . . . . .            | 9    |
| LA FIORAJA ( <i>The Flower Girl</i> ) . . . . .               | 20   |
| LA FESTA DELLE PALME . . . . .                                | 28   |
| HOLY WEEK AND EASTER FEASTS ( <i>I Sepolcri</i> ) . . . . .   | 39   |
| LA FANTESCA ( <i>The Servant Wench</i> ) . . . . .            | 46   |
| IL NEGOZIANTE ( <i>The Shopman</i> ) . . . . .                | 57   |
| LA PETTINATRICE ( <i>The Hairdresser</i> ) . . . . .          | 67   |
| FISHER-FOLK . . . . .   | 77   |
| SANTA MARGHERITA . . . . .                                    | 87   |
| THE LACE WEAVER . . . . .                                     | 97   |
| IL MANENTE ( <i>The Husbandman</i> ) . . . . .                | 106  |
| LA DONNA DI CASA ( <i>The Country Housekeeper</i> ) . . . . . | 116  |
| BATHING TIME . . . . .  | 125  |

## Part Two.

### *IN THE APENNINES.*

|  | PAGE |
|--|------|
| THE MOUNTAINS . . . . .  | 137  |
| AT THE CHESTNUT HARVEST . . . . .                              | 156  |
| UNDER THE CHERRY TREES ( <i>The Bridal</i> ) . . . . .         | 165  |
| THE PARISH PRIEST . . . . .                                    | 175  |
| THE PRIEST'S SERVING MAID . . . . .                            | 185  |
| IL SIGNOR CAPPELLANO . . . . .                                 | 191  |
| SWEEEPING THE CHURCH . . . . .                                 | 200  |
| THE VILLAGE SEMPSTRESS . . . . .                               | 203  |
| THE VILLAGE DAMSEL . . . . .                                   | 217  |
| THE VILLAGE SWAIN . . . . .                                    | 231  |
| THE LOVE-LETTER . . . . .                                      | 240  |
| LA CRESIMA ( <i>The Confirmation Day</i> ) . . . . .           | 252  |
| IN VILLEGGIATURA ( <i>Town Folk in the Country</i> ) . . . . . | 263  |

## Conclusion.

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| IL CORPUS DOMINI ( <i>The Procession</i> ) . . . . . | 275 |
|--|-----|

## FULL-PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS.

|  |                      |
|--|----------------------|
| VIEW OF GENOA, FROM THE TERRACE OF THE ACQUASOLA | <i>Frontispiece</i>  |
| THE FLOWER GIRL . . . . .                        | <i>To face p. 24</i> |
| THE LACE WEAVER . . . . .                        | 98                   |
| THE HUSBANDMAN . . . . .                         | 114                  |
| GOSSIP . . . . .                                 | 170                  |
| THE PARISH PRIEST . . . . .                      | 182                  |
| IL SIGNOR CAPPELLANO . . . . .                   | 194                  |
| THE VILLAGE SEMPSTRESS . . . . .                 | 210                  |
| THE LOVE-LETTER . . . . .                        | 246                  |
| IN VILLEGGIATURA . . . . .                       | 266                  |

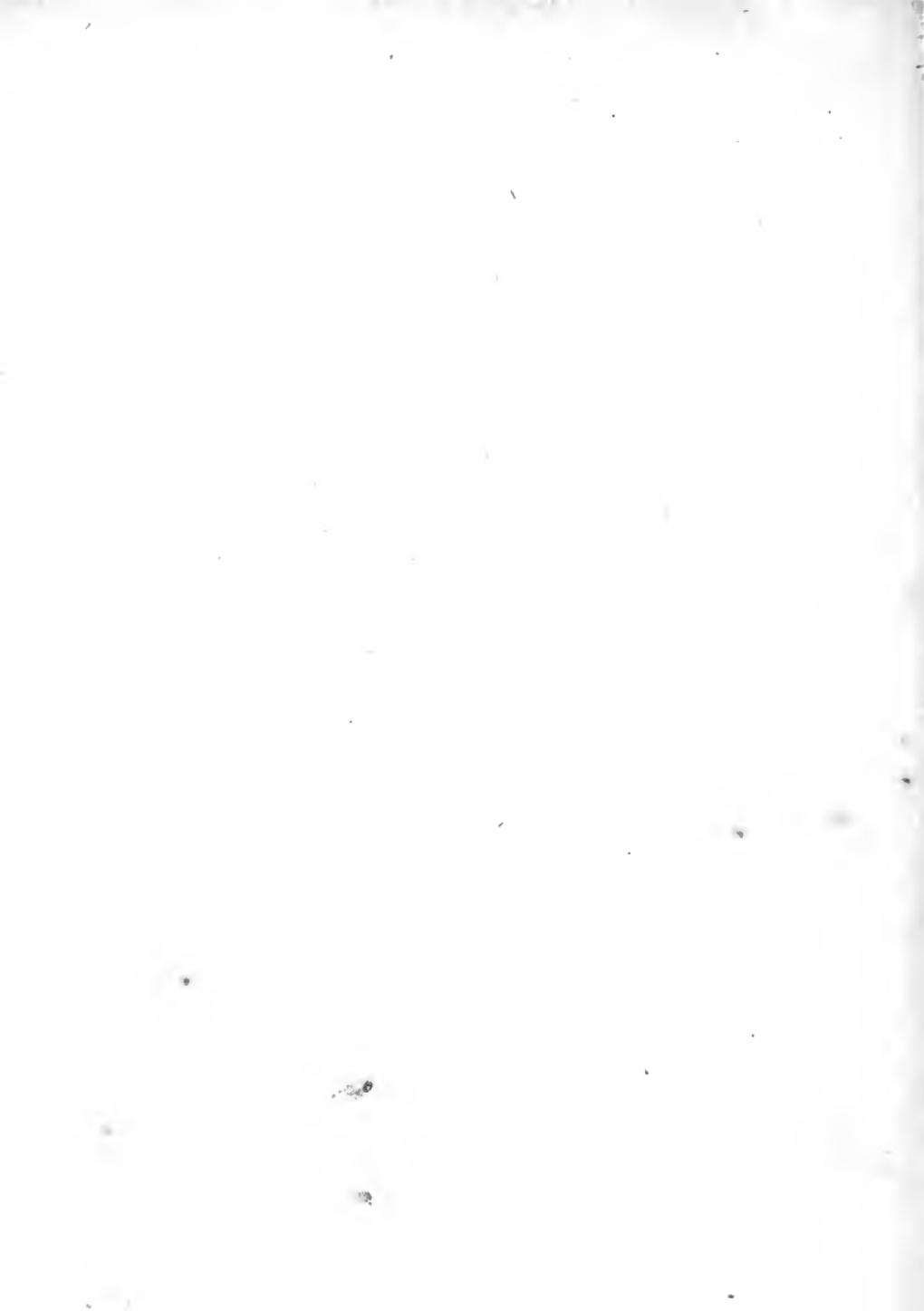
## HALF-PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS.

|   | PAGE |
|---|------|
| THE CARNIVAL . . . . .                          | 15   |
| ON-LOOKERS AT THE PROCESSION OF PALMS . . . . . | 37   |
| MARKETING . . . . .                             | 44   |
| THE SERVANT WENCH . . . . .                     | 49   |

|  | PAGE |
|--|------|
| SHOPMAN AND PURCHASER . . . . .                        | 62   |
| LA PETTINATRICE IN AN OMNIBUS . . . . .                | 70   |
| PAOLO AT SEA . . . . .                                 | 81   |
| VIEW OF SANTA MARGHERITA . . . . .                     | 89   |
| THE MARQUIS AND HIS HOUSEKEEPER . . . . .              | 122  |
| FLIRTATION AT PEGLI . . . . .                          | 131  |
| IN THE FIELDS AT SAVIGNONE , . . . . .                 | 142  |
| GATHERING THE CHESTNUTS . . . . .                      | 161  |
| THE PRIEST'S SERVANT ADMINISTERING A REPROOF . . . . . | 188  |
| BIANCA DECORATES THE ALTAR AND SNUBS THE UNDER PRIEST  | 202  |
| NETTINA RETURNING FROM THE WELL . . . . .              | 226  |
| THE VILLAGE SWAIN AT A BARGAIN . . . . .               | 237  |
| VIRGINIA GOES TO CONFIRMATION . . . . .                | 259  |
| THE PROCESSION OF THE CORPUS DOMINI . . . . .          | 279  |

Part One

*On the Riviera*



## **Genoa.**

SPRING returns. In northern lands, where much work is done and living is hard, our skies are yet grey and the winds blow keen while the earth is hard with the late frosts. Yet almond blossoms bloom sweetly in scant little gardens or beside the bleak walls of town houses, and spring begins to bud even in the lands where spring's struggle is the longest, and as I watch her oncoming and rejoice in her tender-toned early flowers, I must needs remember the home where her life is the fairest and merriest, and her sunlight the stronger to play and be played with. It is the Mediterranean that I call to mind, her winds and waves and sails and rocks, her shores, towers, villages, groves—the light and colour on her kindly people's life. And most of all, as the sunshine grows and the air gets whiter, memory paints again for me that whitest, but not newest of towns, where winds and waves and groves and all are fair, the city of marble—*la Superba*—Genoa, the Queen

of the Riviera. Genoa, no longer the great republic, no longer the city of much merchandise and wealth, but Genoa, the city of palaces still.

Who is there that has seen her from off the waves of her own Mediterranean, and looked upon her as she climbs the slopes on every side, gorgeous in her towers, her domes and cupolas, her terraces and gardens, quietly lying within the great amphitheatre of her hills—who could fail to acknowledge that she is the city of palaces still? Above and around her stand her fortifications, gaunt and grey upon the soft sky, like sentinels upon the tops of the green and barren mountains, while half way down, the hills begin to be dotted with villas and terraces, and, as they creep towards the sea, grow white with palaces and *campanili*, that multiply upon their sides until they become the great town itself, where whiteness is all around in stone and marble. In the streets there is marble, for it is fashioned into churches and colonnades ; and upon the water's brink there is marble still that has taken the shape of terraces and loggias. There is no end to the whiteness, for the air is white too on these early spring days, yet there is no lack of colour as well ; it lurks in the sunshine, it lives on the earth and the sky, is dashed along the public ways in dresses of the people, and over the harbour in curious hues of sails and flags, red and green and yellow, that

the weather has mellowed into harmony. The sky is heavy with colour, in the March air that is keen and sun-steeped. Genoa, with her crooked and narrow streets and her curious nooks, with her picturesque piazzas and her sumptuous churches, of her would I write as I dream of flowers and Eastertide.

The light is everywhere, and everywhere there is something to remember. In crooked, winding ways that climb hills and go down again in steps, and thread dark passages and cross bright piazzas, in ways where winds can be icy cold and suns scarce reach, there are still things whereon memory rests fondly, amongst quaint shops and stalls of fruit-sellers, and fish and flower and green-markets, in hurrying or loitering people, beneath dingy doorways, up dusty stairs, on solemn or gaudy house-fronts. Down upon the wharfs and along the moles where the green waters of the port are not always fragrant as they lap on to time-worn marble steps, there are more things fair to think of in crowding boats and quaint, noisy boatmen, in flapping amber sails of strange fishing smacks, in fine-framed men and women whose shrill voices quarrel and joke, and whose faces and figures bring more colour to the sketch—even something perchance of gala days when stately vessels sailed into the harbour, vessels that were thickly manned and royally freighted, so that flags must needs wave from ships and

skiffs and steamers on the water, and, on land, from turret and terrace, while bouquets were flung and floated, and royal salutes were fired. And from the broader of old streets, where palaces flank the way and are sumptuous with façade and arch and stair, from straight and new streets down which the *Tramontana* can blow grimly enough if the sun can shine also, from loggias on hills that look towards the sunrise, from the walls of tall ramparts that hang over the waves and see the best glory of the sunsets, from every open place, from every nook and corner, more recollections crowd around the first picture of the city's whole. The steep *salite* that are paved with red bricks up the middle, the dark cypress standing against churches, the scent of limes and acacias, the growth of arbutus and horse-chestnut, all come telling some little story of the past. Yet, perhaps, most of all, Genoa's gardens recall the best of Genoa's life, because they are the most bound up with her holiday life—with her Saints and fasts and feast days—for the Ligurians make merry on most of these occasions, and the Acquasola is the way to and from many a sanctuary. And Genoa is full of gardens. Private gardens upon the hill-sides or upon terraces that appear suddenly in the streets, where flowers grow in boxes, and orange and oleander trees bloom in pots as in the free earth—gardens that are open to the public but are none the less rich in

all that nature can lavish, gardens that spring at unexpected turns in the town's heart to break the monotony of the palaces. Some of them have restaurants in their midst, and there, among Japanese medlar-trees with great fibrous leaves, beneath acanthus and willow and magnolia trees, people dine or sip coffee and ices in the company of marble nymphs and heroes, of shivering cupids who toss the water from stone fountains. But the public promenade is the garden that tells most about the town people's public life, for to the *Acquasola* people are wont to go to walk and drive, and meet their acquaintance, and show off new dresses and new equipages. It is the place in which to spend a holiday afternoon. The broad walks are crowded with people, who wander beneath acacia and arbutus trees; fine ladies with attendant cavaliers, mothers of the middle class chaperoning their marriageable daughters, fathers carrying their children that the women may have leisure to enjoy the *festa* dress and the *festa* scene; along the drive and the sycamore and horse-chestnut avenues carriages roll smoothly with gay people. Flower-vendors are there, and men and women with *Madonnette* to sell, or filbert-strings or iced-drinks and wafers. Sometimes a group saunters away to the higher gardens, where the paths wind upward, till they reach a terrace with flowers and

palms and trees from foreign lands. The whole town lies spread beneath; towers and palaces and domes seem to grow softer of outline as evening lights creep around. In the far foreground lies the great valley of the Bisagno, where troops have camped—Zouaves and Africans in gorgeous dress. It is a long stretch of dusty road and arid river-bed, but from the Acquasola none of this is to be seen, and there is only an impression of green country far away, with palaces lying on the slopes of Albano's hill, and a knowledge of sea beyond. Behind the rising ground runs the town's great aqueduct, that is built through glens and copses when once it has left the city's first outskirts. And to your right is the harbour again, with ships and flags and masts, and beyond the harbour a waste of Mediterranean neither blue nor grey nor white, that, in the doubtful light, will seem neither land nor water, lying out towards the sunset, where dim clouds hold Riviera mountains in their midst.

## Martedí Grasso.

### Shrove Tuesday.

OF all the *festas* we used to have—glorious days when the sun might shine as fiercely as it liked and we were only the better pleased, since it was a sin to work outright, but only a venial fault to keep one's shops open a little, and to forget about going to mass—of all those most comfortable saints and Virgins, how few, alas! have they left us now! One can count the strict day off one's fingers. '*Per Bacco*, 'tis a disgrace truly,' mutter the old men and women who have been wont to consider a week where there were not three holidays at least, one really God-forsaken and cursed by the Evil Eye of luck! But, 'well, well, days are changed, and Providence can't expect us to give all that time to religion when it's all we can do to make way against the bad times, and keep a roof over our heads,' say the young men who have wives and growing children, and the women whose piety would not be at all equal to the giving up two francs for a day's ironing, merely because the Virgin chose to institute a rite, or some strange

saint had seen fit to die! 'Tis an ill wind that blows nobody any good! Perhaps the greater half of the population are better pleased than not. The days of the *dolce far niente* are pretty well over, in the north of Italy, at all events, and every man must keep pace with his neighbours. So we let the old people grumble, the half of whose portion it is the duty of sons and daughters to provide, and the rising generation are content. Only when somebody wants to tell a story about Italian *festas*, he finds that the throng which used to be so goodly has grown small indeed, and that, if he must needs be faithful to the present, his choice is very limited, and the colours on his palate must also be only by half so brilliant as they used to be in the old days. For where are the gorgeous trappings, the stately pageants with which Mother Church was wont to send out her saints and her relics? Alas, for the wild days of mirth and folly, for the glittering sights, for the colours of street-pictures, we have grown too cynical and too worldly-wise for such nonsense now! So, we who regret them a little—old people or travellers that come only to marvel, modern Italy says—we are fain to go back a step or two into the days when the sun's glamour off the Mediterranean could still bring colours into boldest relief against dark backgrounds, could search out gloomy corners, and deck streets and people in holiday garb,

making mad with its glitter and its warmth the reckless brains of an untutored Southern nation.

Time ago there was Carnival really as it should be, along the highways and byways, and in the public halls and the private homes of Genoa—not a Carnival so rich and so splendid as the Carnival of Rome, for Genoa merchants have always been close-handed, and even her populace has had a name long past in other Italian districts for shrewd economy ; not a Carnival so studied and so lengthened as the Carnival of Milan, for Milan is a city privileged of Mother Church, and can keep up her frolic when other towns have been three days shrouded in ashes and penitence ; still a Carnival no way to be despised as a means of enjoyment, even of unmeasured madness and merriment for those to whom such things come easily. And such things used to come very easily to many people in the days that we, mourners of better Carnivals, can call to mind.

Holy Week, called *la settimana grassa*, is past. Lent moves forward apace with gloomy garments, with sack-cloth and ashes, and calls to prayer and penitence ! Come, let us make good use of this last day of reprieve ! For it is Martedì Grasso, and with to-morrow's sun dawns Ash-Wednesday !

The picture is in shade as the morning breaks, for there are faint clouds overhead—after all, it is only

February—and the sun has only half its strength, and only a grey colour for silver glory to shed over the Mediterranean, and off the Mediterranean, up on to the green hills and marble terraces of the town. The sea is not blue but white, beneath these pearl-grey clouds, that let the sun through as through a veil, but it is calm, the limpid waves of it lapping gently on to the knotted and slimy rocks of the coast. There is but little to complain of in the weather, and before the midday meal has been eaten, before even the most impatient of spectators or the maddest of masqueraders have begun to line the sides of the streets where the *Corso* will pass—our sun has made his way as usual through all obstacles, and makes the sky and the sea blue, the streets and the people bright with his gladdening warmth. The highways begin to swarm with people that press and pour in from the hundred little yards and colonnades and alleys of which the old city has so many ; they are men and women of the peasantry from without the walls, of the smaller tradesmen, from within—the people who, in all nations, would rather stand breathless for hours in a throng than miss the exultation of giving the first shout for the first rumour of a pageant's approach. The women of this crowd are mostly conspicuous for dark red and blue gowns of stout homespun linen,

called in the neighbourhood *bordato*, or for gowns of brilliant coloured calicoes gaily-flowered in pattern, for kerchiefs of still gaudier hue, orange and crimson, for massive and curiously wrought gold ornaments—they are the *contadine*, and as yet the tradesmen's wives are but a handful. You will know these, as they push their way into the medley, by their cunningly built hair that is smoothed into a perfect mirror of glossiness, and coiled and twisted and piled into a marvel of structure; mark them by their worsted dress also, and by the silken jacket after a Paris *mode* of some years back, or the cashmere shawl in place of the gaudy kerchief about their shoulders.

The Piazza San Lorenzo or of the Cathedral, the Piazza before the Ducal Palace and Sant' Ambrogio, have both seen something of the crowd as the people pressed up from the heart of the city to reach the more open thoroughfares; the Piazza San Domenico where the Opera House stands, and where of early mornings these same men and women are wont to come buying and selling at market, has also been a gangway for the mob, but none of these places see the best of the Carnival, for the cream of the *Corso* is down the Vie Nuove and Nuovissime. So the people fight their way from Piazza S. Domenico, down the Via Carlo Felice, to the Piazza delle Fontane Amoroze, for here the Carnival

will soon begin in good earnest. The balconies of the Spinola Palace, of the Pallavicini, Brignole, Serra, Durazzo, and of all the palaces down these chiefest, beautiful streets, have been decked with crimson hangings and cushions, with gold and green and amber trappings, curious heir-looms that for centuries perhaps have been kept for such occasions. Baskets of flowers, stocks, violets, heartsease, camellias red and white, and everything that commonly blooms here in the winter time, are placed ready for gallants and ladies soon to shower on the masqueraders beneath. The air is a little cold, but the sun shines, the sky is blue, faces and colours wake to merriest life.

The first of the merry-makers has appeared. He is a buffoon, with tawdry costume and hideous mask, he is of the people and comes along on foot, hurling jests and poisonous comfits around him, but all the more the people are amused ; they hoot and cheer, and so he passes down the ranks. He is quickly followed by another mask, also of the people, but this one drives a donkey in a small cart ; he is ill-dressed with a purpose, he screams, he gesticulates, he is evidently the caricature of some pet grievance, for the mob cry aloud for joy. But this is not the *Corso* ; this would not content even the populace—great things are coming. Ladies of the nobility—beautiful, with hair dressed after the

French fashion, and silken garments and graciously-smiling faces—begin to fill the balconies. They nod and laugh and pose gracefully to their attendant gallants, then they rise in their seats to pose and laugh



THE CARNIVAL.

again for other gallants who are in the masquerading throng beneath, and upon whom they will shower comfits and flowers and smiles alike, to get comfits and flowers in return. For the *CORSO* is all alive now.

It is four o'clock, and past. On the lower ranges of balconies, windows of offices and less important houses, the ladies of the merchant class are airing themselves likewise in scarce less costly array, to get what attention they may from masqueraders in their own set; while servant wenches and shop-girls, who aspire to no post at a window and are proud in the possession of a black silk apron, a *pezzotto* veil, and a little gold for ornament, parade the street happily on the arm or in search of a lover. The air is laden with colour, and every turn of the beautiful winding street flashes out some new bit of it, in waving banner, fluttering drapery, or passing throng.

The great car of the afternoon is coming. Most of the cars have been out before at the Sunday *CORSO*, but this one has reserved itself for the last of the Carnival—it is the feature of this Martedì Grasso. People shout along the street, and heads are all turned one way from out the windows. It is in sight—a ship amid wavy billows of blue silk for sea; it sways as the car moves. ‘Tis truly natural,’ yells the mob, and cheers. The ship’s bulwarks are of silver, its sails of rosy silk and golden tinsel; its masts are manned with sailors in handsome garb, whose masks counterfeit handsome faces. It is pronounced a wonderful success. From the balconies flowery missiles fly swiftly, to light daintily

where they will—most often where the fair marks-women themselves will *not*! And the handsome sailors pelt back again, pelt on all sides, pelt the ladies with flowers, the children with comfits, the mob with *coriandoli*, that, being made only of flour, burst as they fall, to sprinkle their prey with a white storm of dust. It is a scene of the maddest, merriest confusion. But the sailors have been recognised by balcony ladies, pelted by mob admirers, appreciated by all: the ship moves on to give place to some other part of the pageant. Carriages follow closely on one another between the lines of the crowd; they are all filled with masqueraders—boys in clown dress, in Masaniello dress, as harlequins, as marquises; little girls as shepherdesses, as vivandières, powdered countesses; fathers and mothers in dominoes for escort. Out of every carriage somebody pelts and cheers to be cheered again, and now and then comes a more elaborate car, on which the mob are scarce restrained from falling for very excitement. Afternoon wears away into evening; bouquets, that have loaded the air with colour and perfume, are trampled now under foot; the *coriandoli* bags are empty in the maskers' cars; their supply of comfits is exhausted—not so the spirits of men and women, whether of nobles and gentle-folk at the windows, or of shop-girls and *contadini* below. If it is too dark to see the maskers, and to pelt in the

streets—since Government no longer allows the *mocoletti* lights, which it used to be our fun to put out for one another as darkness deepened—are there not still the *Veglioni* to come, and shall we not dance if we may not pelt? Surely : for is not to-day the last of the Carnival? So, as the night hours lengthen, and just before they begin to grow short again, the streets, that were quieter for an hour, begin to live again with bustle. In carriage or on foot, all classes of people are going to the masked balls of the theatre. *Marchese*, in the boxes which are their family's heritage at the opera, to look down on the gay scene of masked dancers in the amphitheatre beneath, and to receive the visits of dominoed gallants with whom their jests are both broad and lively ; men and women of the lower orders to entertainments in their own set, or even to the amphitheatre of the Opera House itself, where the highest nobility has been known not too proud, in dominoes, gallantly to address many a prettily masked servant wench : for of the nobles only the men may fitly descend into the masked ball-room, just as the *Marchese* are free to receive who they will into their boxes, and to thrust and parry with the masked intruder as best they may. ‘Ah, in truth it is delightful to be noble and to possess a box at the Opera,’ sighs many a merchant’s lady, because for love or money you cannot otherwise

procure one for the night of the great *Veglione*. And so, dancing and flirting and jesting, the hours grow old again into day, the gas-lights burn yellow in the grey light of morning, the paint and the powder have lost their excellence, the dresses are marred and tarnished. But are spirits grown weary, is merriment spent, though the Last of the Carnival is dead, and the sun has risen on Ash-Wednesday? ‘Ah—everything is changed,’ moans out some old lady of the old school; ‘so used the Martedì Grasso to be in my young days, or even a few years ago, but now—*non c'è Carnevale!*’

## La Fioraja.

*The Flower Girl.*

SUNSHINE is full on this picture even as it first climbs the horizon of our memory: full on the shifting Mediterranean, that is bluer for its presence, full on the white walls of new houses, on the yellow shutters of old palaces inland, strong amid fleeting clouds that are the whiter for its power, fitful on these girl-faces, that shine the merrier for its sake. Because the wind has blown cold from the mountains these three days past—the sharp *Tramontana* that sweeps down the northward valleys to blight the budding trees, to whirl the dust in clouds, to lash the sea's water into bristling crests—and if the cheering sun shine not, we, who must oftentimes meet the wind's greeting at street corners, and shiver out the daylight hours beneath palace porticoes, shall have but a sorry time of it indeed! For even the flowers that make our livelihood have a hard fight and a poor success of it in this weather. ‘One must have patience!’ Only ‘tis pity the enemy could not just have waited till a little further into Lent, when good Catholics having had their

fill of amusement, see fit to waken conscience to a little necessary obedience and expiation : when camellias could therefore no longer fetch so good a price ! For so early in the Church's penance season as this, society makes Carnival still in her private homes ; we are grown lax about fasts nowadays, as we have grown wisely cynical over feasts and processions, and who would drown merriment to wear sackcloth forty days long, unless it were with a much surer hope of reward than modern Romanists think prudent to believe ? No, no ; the last Lenten week, when there is plenty of excitement in mission preaching, *sepolcri* and masses—when Easter's sun, moreover, begins already to lighten the horizon before us, the six days of Holy Week make up the sum of all the fasts we do in our enlightened generation ! Let the camellias bloom fair yet awhile, and we will pray the Madonna to keep the *Tramontana* back for another month, say the flower-girls !

Rosina is the favourite of all the *fioraje* of the Carlo Felice, and that is the favourite flower street of Genoa. When the sun shines as bright as it does to-day, out of a sky that is as blue in the cold, and when it lies with a great sheet of light on the square flag-stones of the Piazza S. Domenico, Rosina's face is as the sunlight itself that can be friendly even in an air so hard as this is with *Tramontana*. And it is merriment that pays, that wins

the loved jest from lowly swains, the soft compliment from gracious *signori*, that sells the camellias, and adds many a mite on to a bargain! Who cares for a pathetic face and a wistful gaze? Such cunning arts are only for '*marchesine*' and ladies who can afford powder; we of the people had best trust to a healthy frame and a kindling eye, and to the jests and smiles of a light heart, for *our* conquests! Truly, it is in this wise that Rosina has come to be '*la bella dei Portici*', and it is by simple and lighthearted devices that have made many a gallant think of her as the reflection of this cold, bright sunshine itself, that our flower-girl can keep so many and such fragrant bouquets on her stall in the gateway and such a goodly hoard of soiled old *soldi* in her pocket. To-day, heedless of the cruel *Tramontana*, she has been up with the kindly sun's return, and in her garden among the camellias. All the buds that bore any promise for immediate use were nipped off at the very flower and thrown into the common basket, and when the round of the camellia grove had been made Rosina went on her knees to pluck the purple heartsease, to strip the beds where bloom the pale Neapolitan violets, and then on her tip-toes, with upstretched, graceful arm, to tear down the '*fiorellin d'oro*' from the wall, to break the blossom of the Judas tree. All the time the wind was sharp, the sky darkly blue; and the

sun had no warmth till Rosina had been awhile in the stock garden and had spoiled the straight stalks of their gaudy flowers, mixing into this basket a handful of striving carnations and a share of sweetly-scented myrtle twigs, besides large-veined and dark-hued medlar leaves, wherewith to build the outer frame of her stiff bouquets. Poor flower season ! It is past, and is not come again, but we have our glory still at Genoa, in the camellias, as people have in no other town—thank the Virgin !

So the early morning is gone, and Rosina is at her post beneath the Carlo Felice door-way. The sun has outstripped the east wind in power by this time, and for those who walk within its hearty radiance, and avoid the northward corners of streets—for those who, like our Rosina, sit within reach of its rays in some sheltered corner, the *Tramontana* matters but little. Indeed, Rosina forgot long ago how she had grumbled at the cold in those early hours after dawn in her Villa delle Peschiere, forgot it as she came down the narrow way of the Salita Sta. Trinità, when you might have seen her tall and buxom figure swaying gently on its firm, broad hips, erect as a reed, and as a reed pliant to circumstance, while on her head and in one downward-pointed hand she carried baskets of flower-material, and on her curved left arm bore the child of some busy mother. Truly, she is a girl of much presence, as indeed all the

lads of the town do allow ! For all the youth of the town knows Rosina who sits all day in the portico of the Palazzo Spinola, via Carlo Felice ! It is not for nothing that she has that tall and massive figure, those heavy coils of bright, black hair with the broad waves, that smooth skin with the faint fresh colour, those even rows of white teeth that appear so often when the merry smile parts her rosy lips ! She knows how to use all the fair gifts of nature, and best of all how to make use of two saucy black eyes in the trade which she plies daily so well—for who sells so many flowers as Rosina ? Watch her now at work. Her striking person sits framed in an old gateway, round whose margin a graceful design of fruits and flowers in low relief—sad, neglected memory of days long fled—lies yellow upon yellow marble. Above her head, over the palace portal, another bas-relief, black with age, serves her for canopy ; but this one is of fighting men and horses, and passionate of expression. Beneath her feet, a black and white pavement stretches back into the gloom of the court, that finishes in a scantily grass-grown yard whose almond trees will not be rosy with blossom till the last of Lent. And the background is varied by the flowering plants and shrubs of Rosina's stock in pots, while away in the dimness, the soiled staircase—of marble, like everything else architectural—winds up to the first, and then higher



### *The Flower Girl.*

So she sits, with flowers close around her—red and yellow tulips, festive-looking camellias—to set off the strongly-coloured portrait of herself; and as she sits she picks the heads of blossoms from baskets at her feet.



and higher to the fifth floor of Palazzo Spinola. So she sits—with flowers close around her, red and yellow tulips, festive-looking camellias, to set off the strongly-coloured portrait of herself, and as she sits she picks the heads of blossoms from baskets at her feet, to open and bend the poor petals of them at her will, and to wire them for her bouquets. See one with pink carnations in a cross on a field of white! It is as large as a small-sized table and quite even in its flatness—it is for the Church of San Luca. And here another, smaller and choicer of flowers, but scarce less stiff in appearance; it is white with violets around, and has been ordered by the Marchesa Pallavicini. Rosina is weaving more posies as she converses in loud tones with the old woman behind and glances up now and then to the street's opposite side where wayfarers grow hourly thicker on the pavement and where, in another portico, old but not as beautiful as her own, an aged man has already begun to roast chestnuts. There is a *fiorista*, maker of false flowers, on the first-floor of the opposite house—she has nothing picturesque to show as our *fioraja* has; but, alas, modern Italy thinks far more of la Signora Raffo's trade than it does of our Rosina's! She herself is of the same opinion for the matter of that, and no one can praise a perfect flower of hers so much to her mind as by saying it is like a false one.

'To-night is the ball of la Marchesa Del Mele. I sell all that I have in flowers before twelve o'clock, you will see,' calls Rosina in her loud brave voice to the porter's wife who sweeps the staircase behind; 'gracious! your honour did make me jump,' adds she quickly to the polished and perfumed *signore* who now darkens the sunlight in the portico. 'Indeed!' laughs the young man. 'No, no, you don't make me believe I catch you unawares, *bella*—you, who have eyes at the back of your head as sharp as those two bright ones in front! Well, well,' as Rosina laughs to show her pearly teeth, 'we all know you! But now give me a flower—one for myself—a knot of violets, emblems of thine own fair modesty;' il Marchese del D—— (for it is he) laughs as he says this, looking at Rosina. 'Shame!' remonstrates the damsel, bending over her flowers to choose out the *mazzetto di viole*, but the blush does not rise to her smooth cheek, and she only says, presenting the flowers, '*Il signor marchese* will buy something for his lady of to-night?' 'Surely, make me a thing of taste, all white with violets, and we will agree to-morrow for the price. With pretty girls one makes no bargain!' And the *marchese* goes, only to leave the field for other gallant butterflies and purchasers who all agree that 'with pretty girls one makes no bargain.' Truly, Rosina's free, fair face is worth many *soldi* to her purse! The day grows—it is

time to eat maccaroni in the porter's lodge, while little Tonietta keeps watch beside the flower-stall. And when the sun is near to setting in the early afternoon and the *Tramontana* blows chiller than ever, a man passes down the staircase, out of the many that have passed up and down this day, who calls the blush for the first time to the cheek of our *fioraja*. He also is a perfumed youth, but he is no *marchese*—only the son of Ricardi who keeps the manufactory for pianos upstairs. He stands a long time beside Rosina's chair while her swift fingers twine bouquets for the ball of to-night; fast they talk, and merrily laugh and broadly jest, till Rosina's saucy glances are well-nigh quelled, and she is forced to blush a bit and remonstrate—till the gas-lights are burning in the streets, moreover, and it is time for the flowers to go home to their purchasers. Then *la fioraja* sweeps up the faded blossoms and the broken stalks on her square of marble pavement, and with them she sweeps away all the dead jests and forgotten words of to-day, all the love-making and the banter. Gathering together her baskets she climbs the Salita S. Trinità once more, to remember little else at the top but the sum of those gains that she counts over so proudly.

### *La Festa delle Palme.*

THERE are no consistencies to uphold in Italy, no conventionalities to overcome, and festa-making revels in true glory among the pleasure-loving natures, that are soft and fiery, mad and merry, all at one time. No fickle chances disturb the course of fasts and feasts ; the Roman Church holds her sway above all else, self-sufficient and serene ; and the people have learnt to love the old days and seasons by this time, and are nothing loth to lend their aid to the pageant. Yet even were her children deaf to the call, the Church would still put up her pictures, nor alter one jot of her proceedings because of their indifference. Amid all that is false and hollow the system has its good side, as most systems have ; the Roman Church binds the people together with her festivals, even if they scoff at them now and then, and to her we owe the beauty of the broad lights and shades that are thus cast over the nation as a whole. Seasons change and come again (now days of joy, now days of woe) bringing each some brightly-painted symbol of ancient tradition, some well-worn mystery that has had

its hold for ages on the imaginative mind of the people; symbols and mysteries work their way as of old, the days that are gone are linked to the days that are, so that, in their festas, the people of Italy are one nation from end to end of the land. They may not believe very clearly—many do not pretend to believe at all—but they find a zest none the less eager for that, in each of the seasons as it comes, with its mysteries to be marvelled at, and its duties to be done. It is *festa*, and *festa* garb must be donned, *festa* bells must sound. The people put on their bright colours, and are merry with a matter-of-course and yet a true merriment, as though they caught the light-heartedness reflected from their blues and reds and yellows. And when gala days are over, and Lent is to be met, they put aside their carnival and eat '*magro*' almost as contentedly!

Carnival over, the pranks of the masqueraders are followed closely by Lent's fastings, and these would perhaps scarcely be borne so patiently, were it not for the solace that can be seen throughout the forty days in the distance. That solace is the Feast of the Palms, with the strange week of mixed penance and excitement, of gay sights interwoven with sorry dirges, that ushers in the Eastertide.

In days when people all go abroad, and can criticise and scan for themselves, talk about these things would

seem almost superfluous were it not for those spots that lie beyond the range of the stream of travellers rushing on year after year towards the great capital, and that can yet show, within their capacity, as fair and joyous a festival as any that reigns supreme at St. Peter's, or flaunts its gaudy pageant along the streets of Rome. Little roadside nooks there are upon the shores of the Mediterranean, or among the clefts of the Apennines—places still unspoiled and unmolested by the foreigners, with their levelling influence—where perhaps the festival will be even quainter than in any of the towns. Here and there, on the lip of little dainty bays that secretly lie along the coast, palm-trees flourish in the fertile soil, with the soft and sultry breath of African deserts blowing gently upon them from across the Mediterranean. Sometimes they stand alone in their grace, growing up erect and sudden from out the moist hot earth, with arched and slender branches that are set around their heads and that droop gently with the weight of tapering leaves. Sometimes they grow in knots along the shore, or in little plantations that stretch upward towards the hills. The pale-blue sky is spread above the pale-blue sea, and above the deeper-coloured earth, and the palm-trees stand up quietly against it, with frail outlines clearly traced in the keen air.

All along the Riviera, whether in towns or villages,

there is *festa* for Passion-week and Easter. In rain as in sunshine, processions march forth beneath weather-worn banners to worship familiar relics, and bells chime gaily, and fresh veils and kerchiefs are pulled out to deck pious or laughing faces, while the palms are blessed and the Holy Sepulchre is built up around the altar.

And yet it is not the Cornice villages, nor the sunny groves where the palms have their birth, that I remember at this season most willingly. Again, the crooked ways of Genoa, her gorgeous churches and ample piazzas, are the things that rise before me as the Easter time comes back once more.

The Festival of Palms seems always to have been one of the dearest of gala-days to the hearts of the Genoese people. Spring is then at hand, that will bring flowers and fruits and warm days. Passion-week is close on the festival's joy, and there is woe to be met ere the Easter sun can dawn, so the people make merry for Palm Sunday and for many days before. Upon the first days of the preceding week those branches are gathered from the sunny plantations of Bordighera, that are to be plaited and adorned and consecrated in the churches, that they may wither out a whole year above the bed of some peasant woman or child. Not such a fair life, perhaps, as the life of those sister branches that flourish and wave and grow green again

in the pale sunshine and the cool night-breezes of the shores ; but the same blue sky of Italy is overhead, and beneath it even the yellow boughs on a whitewashed wall have their fitting grace.

On Monday the market of San Domenico begins to be filled with peasants who bring palms from the Riviera, and by Wednesday the long leaves are ready bleached to be fashioned into the wonted curious shapes ; for they may not remain green as nature bade them. By some process handed down from past generations they are dyed of a faintly yellow colour, that they may the better last unshrivelled from Eastertide to Easter-tide again for sacred guards and memories. The market-place, always a wondrous scene of confusion and vociferation, is now more perturbed than ever. The palms are set up in queer water-tubs, whence they are taken one by one to be rapidly transformed into fantastic shapes beneath the swift hands of girls who have grown deft in the art of flower-weaving for which Genoa is specially famous. The women split the slender fibres asunder, and then braid them together again and build them up in a strange medley of loops and bows, from whose midst one spray of the natural leaves is allowed to wave ; at last they fasten little patches of gold-leaf upon the plaits, and stick a bit of olive-branch coquettishly on one side. The making of the *palme* is a true example

of Italian taste, that loves nothing so well in its natural as in its artificial state. Flowers grow with little tending and have beauty enough ; magnolias and pomegranates, camellia and oleander trees, bloom each in turn throughout the land, and never fail in their perfection, and still the people have no higher praise for the fairest blossoms of their glens and their gardens than the words, ‘They are as good as false ones !’

As the days wear on—Thursday, Friday, Saturday—customers grow frequent on the market-places, and inevitable vociferations wax more eager as the sale progresses :

‘ That palm there, with the golden leaf—how much, good woman ? ’

‘ Forty-three *soldi*. ’

‘ Holy Virgin, you would rob the Lord Almighty himself ! I will give you thirty-five ! ’

‘ Not for the world. I would sooner present it myself to San Lorenzo.’

And so the bargaining goes on for, perhaps, half-an-hour, until the prize is carried off for some two or three centimes more than the first sum offered by the purchaser. No Genoese marketer would dream of buying at the price demanded, nor a seller of asking at first the price he means to take at last.

In the *Via de’ Orefici*, or the Goldsmiths’ Street,

there are also booths set up, and the palm-plaiting is going on vigorously. This street is narrow, too narrow to be one of the main thoroughfares ; but it is also one of the most picturesque of the town. Most of the jewel-lers' shops have no plate-glass windows, they stand out into the street, as it were, because the frames in which the gold-work is set are fixed to the outer walls ; and the shops themselves are freely open to the passers, their glittering display of gold and silver filigree making the way brightly gorgeous with a character that is quite peculiar. There is no room for booths in the *Via de' Orefici*, but in a little piazza close by, called the *Piazza di Campetto*, the buying and selling of the palms go on busily. Throngs of people stream out thence into the narrow streets around, where palaces stand up stately on either side and, through a strip of blue sky above, the sun looks down furtively upon dark and winding ways that are bright now with colour and alive with hurrying folk. They are alive and strong and busy, yet even in their bustle and merriment they seem like some picture of the old life in those by-gone days when the lordly palaces and winding streets first grew into being.

As the night draws on, the workers kindle rough pine torches, whose fierce uneven light flares and flickers across the piazza and upon the faces of near bystanders ; the sky looks black then overhead, and there are black

shadows side by side with the red glare. The sale of palms must cease early on the Sunday morning, so that by Saturday night the holders of booths are well pleased to have their stock nearly disposed of. At all events the palms must be ready plaited to be set in the large market before sunrise to-morrow, because by eight o'clock the Piazza S. Domenico must be clear, even of marketers who have left their purchase to the last minute before church time.

Masses are being sung betimes, and the churches will be crowded long before the great service of the day at eleven o'clock. The streets are full to overflowing. Through the great *Piazza delle Fontane Amorose* the people flock in a strange medley, each class in special attire. There are women of the merchant class, complacent in new spring dresses, who wear their fresh muslin *pez-zotti* after the new mode, the better to display their cunningly-plaited hair and ornaments of finely-wrought gold. There are servant-girls who have not much gold to show, but whose tresses are even more prettily arranged: and these smooth their black-silk aprons with an air of superiority as they note the factory girls, who have theirs only of woollen stuff. There are people of the gentry, who wear silk dresses and bonnets of Paris fashion, as they think, but these do not appear to much advantage on a day like this. Then there are

peasant women, whose gorgeous red and orange-coloured kerchiefs serve better than all the rest to paint the streets over with brilliant tone ; their ornaments are of massive gold moulded into ancient forms, the scarves that drape their heads and shoulders of many colours grotesquely designed, and of thicker material than the town-women's muslin *pezzotti* ; they call the thick scarf *mezzaro*.

The crowds wend their way through the town to the different churches, and now before the ducal palace they begin to grow denser than ever, for this is the way to the cathedral, where the Archbishop of Genoa is to bless the palms himself, at high mass. The great steps of the Duomo are covered with the multitude ; the people press up them between the carven lions, through the beautiful gateways, and stand thickly packed beneath the central arch, where St. Laurence lies stretched on the torturing irons, and still other people are fighting their way through the piazza, and keep pouring in from the back streets. Boys and girls, men and women, mothers with swaddled infants, children that can barely walk alone and that have to be perched on the great lions which flank the steps of the Duomo, that they may have a chance of a sight of the procession ; old women with ugly faces, who seem to be the more devout for their ugliness ; men, of whom many make but a poor show even of outward respect ;—all are jostled together upon

the steps and in the entrances ; and within the church's aisles more people again are moving.



ON-LOOKERS AT THE PROCESSION OF PALMS.

The chanting and preaching begin within, varied now and then by the rise and fall of barely suppressed voices

throughout the nave. Then the procession comes forth —banners and images, and crowds of children bearing their white palms. The priest's monotone continues within, and the procession outside makes answer. Its flag-bearers knock upon the gates of the church, and then the palms and the banners enter again. There is more of the ceremony, but even the people attend but sparingly to it. The crowd lingers awhile ; some kneel on the steps to pray, some enter the cathedral as best they can for benediction ; many more wait about outside and talk and laugh and gesticulate, but when mass is done, mothers and fathers claim their children from out the procession, and the multitudes disperse quietly.

The day's afternoon is spent in the public ways and the public gardens. Perfect enjoyment for an Italian is the enjoyment of idleness, and he wears it with a graceful sort of sincerity. Day sinks into darkness, but the caffès are still open. The fire must not die out too soon, since with the morrow fasting must begin again.

So, amid laughter and jollity, *La festa delle Palme* sinks away with everything else that is gone into the past things of the year.

## Holy Week and Easter Feasts.

### I Sepolcri.

THE PALMS are blessed and done with, fasting has begun, for even the first week-days of the *Settimana Santa* are ‘*giorni magri*,’ though few folks pretend to practise any self-denial until the last three days of the week. Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday pass without much ado. The preacher-monks harangue congregations in churches, upon highways and market-places, pouring forth strange prognostications and fiery words, often of the most grotesque. But the *Frati predicatori* are as nothing in the eyes of the populace compared with the sights and wonders that begin to multiply on Maundy Thursday. It is the day of the *Santo Sepolcro*.

People throng the churches; a pilgrimage to one or more of them is considered a sacred and a necessary duty. The Duomo is crowded. Worshippers tread the aisles of *Sant' Ambrogio*, that church which is famous to travellers for its Rubens, but to the inartistic natives for its ashes of St. John, and at this season for its magni-

fidence of camellias : they kneel at its confessionals and bow before its altars and pray before its Christs and Virgins.

The scene is strange. The priests have spread *Il Santo Sepolcro* around the chief altar. It is arranged in every church more or less fitly, but in every church the details are different, if the main effect must needs be the same. Miniature gardens, meadows, and cornfields, fashioned out of bleached and yellow grasses, with flowers in their midst, cover the marble pavement within the altar rails ; and amid the gardens and the flowers little figures of men and women are set talking and labouring in the fields. This is the foreground, and in the near distance perhaps rises a tiny hill, with three nude crosses upon it, while farther back, where the altar is wont to be, rests—among a wealth of flowers and many gaudy trappings—the body of the Christ in its rocky sepulchre. Hundreds of wax candles are alight upon the reredos, and there is a soft yellow radiance in the nave. *Sant' Ambrogio* is famed for its flowers. To-day pillars of red and white camellias stand high above people's heads on either side the chancel's entrance, and down upon its pavement there are spring roses and heartsease, daffodils and bright ranunculus growing among moss and bleached grasses, or shining from out quaintly stiff posies.

People pass in and out of the churches all day. They say their prayers to the Christ in *Sant' Ambrogio*, and then they go on to *La Maddalena* or to *San Luca*, and say more prayers and gaze on new wonders. This is penance and prayer-time, and people must think a little about the next world, however much they love this one, says the good Catholic! And these Lenten duties are not much harder than festival ones after all, enshrined as they are in sights and sounds and beloved mysteries. *La Madonna della Nunziata* is another church, holding a place of honour on this day, not so much by reason of her flowers as because of her riches and the great number of her masses. *La Madonna della Nunziata* is that church of most gorgeous interior, where massive columns of rare marbles bear up a frescoed and heavily-gilded roof. It is rich in costly decoration, in gems and bright colours. The citizens hold it of great account and crowd thither to-day to worship at the *Santo Sepolcro*, though they have flocked from church to church already, and told their beads, and whispered their criticisms and little bits of gossip, saying to themselves the while that the more churches they visit the more ease it will be to their souls. The devout make a long stride towards heaven on Maundy Thursday, but they have a hard day's work of it all the same, for when they are not on their feet they are on their knees. It is sure

to rain the whole time, if not in hearty showers, then with a desponding fine rain out of scirocco clouds : as indeed it ought in answer to the prayers that have bade Heaven send moisture for all the good things of the land which are growing. The devout do not complain. Heaven is forced to weep on this day of woe, and all the green things of nature will spring the better meanwhile, so they trudge contentedly, with veils that are soiled and damp (for the devout are almost always women), and red and green umbrellas, to make some gay-coloured things in the sad streets. They are not even too much fatigued to go to the night ceremony at the Duomo, when the archbishop washes the feet of the pilgrims ; and even by that time the excitement has scarcely been enough for them, but they must needs eagerly question one another about the way in which the *Signore* is laid out in *Santa Catarina* or in the *Cappucini*. And the prayers must all be prayed before the Sepulchre, its wonders seen and conned over ere the dawn of Good Friday, for then the spectacle must be cleared away to make room for still graver duties. It is no doubt for the greater convenience of Easter preparations that the Roman Church has decreed the Burial should be solemnized before the Crucifixion—but the devout do not seem to have a scruple as to the fitness of this arrangement, and are just as ready for funeral

ceremonies as though they had not celebrated the interment beforehand. There are no flowers in the sanctuaries on Good Friday—all day long there is only black drapery and sad music, and bells that must not sound ; for the Church would fain tune all to her solemn silence until the mid-day of Saturday, when all the chimes from all the steeples and domes break out together, and the great deep-toned bell of the cathedral peals out afterwards alone. Easter is rung in with the spring.

All over the country, and wherever there is a spare nook in this town of palaces and marble, the peach and almond trees, the Judas and apricot blossoms spread a dainty cloth of colour, while against the rose-tinted flower of fruit-trees, lilacs and banksia roses begin to bloom in contrast. Before the month is out laburnum and acacia will be striving for mastery with the orange-blossoms.

A fresh wind blows over the town upon the morning of Easter-day. Ere the sun has been up an hour housewives are bargaining on the Piazza S. Domenico for the peas and greens and gaudy tulips. Easter eggs are set out for sale in confectioners' windows, along the high streets, upon booths in the public ways or smaller shops in the dark alleys. Every child, rich or poor, must have an egg for his Easter morning gift. People go to

mass again, but not as they went during Holy Week, for this day is a day of holiday-making proper.

Scarce can a busy marketer spare time from her early purchasing to spend ten minutes before the altar



of some church on her way, that she may just save her soul from the neglect of a binding duty, but no one thinks very much of mass and vesper to-day, when the *ravioli* have to be made before twelve o'clock, and the fish-stalls have yet to be sought far down the

town, after the green-market has duly been searched and spoiled. ‘The priests will pray for us to-day,’ say the devout, as they dip their fingers in holy water coming out from Benediction. They loiter awhile before the church door to buy some image, or coin, or rosary as they talk—or some Easter egg of crimson dye; but they are soon home again with the peas and the marjoram and bay for the day’s great dish, with the fresh fish and the lump of lean, solid beef, and the brains and the sweetbread. The dinner must be cooked, or at least superintended, the dinner must be eaten before idleness can begin. But, when the hours have crept well into afternoon, holiday dresses begin to flit gaily through the spring green of trees on the public gardens, holiday voices and holiday jests ring along the broad avenues and under the boughs of budding chestnuts. The sunshine is broad and pleasant, there is no heat to annoy and no curt breeze to ruffle tempers; it is really warm weather. No one wittingly gives a thought to the blushing orchard-bloom or the blue April sky—no one speaks of the fair tulips, the white narcissus, the lilacs and roses that are a-flower, but the light-hearted laugh the lighter all the same for knowledge that the spring-time is back again.

## La Fantesca.

### The Servant Wench.

THE sky is dull and sad to-day, and so the Mediterranean is grey. Even where the low-lying horizon clouds have parted a little to let through a far-away memory of sunlight, it is only a whiter grey light that outlines the margin of water and sky, and where the sea's surface is broken into ripples by the softest of stirring breezes, the harmonies of shadows and relief are still in faint and faded colour-scales. It is a scirocco. Dull and sleepy vapours rest on the mountains around and creep down towards the town and the bay.

This picture of the Mediterranean is in shade, and the Mediterranean city lies clouded where Maddalena dwells, so that she is not glad, for her mistress is to give her holiday to-day because Tomasina, the sister's eldest, is to make first communion, and, please the Virgin, there will be fine doings. The sister is no poor woman ; she married the *pizzicagnolo*, or sausage merchant, in Via Luccoli, and can afford to spend a few francs. 'Tis a sad shame indeed that the day be so gloomy, for

sunshine lights many a face into smiles that else would be shy and sallow, and sunshine accords well with holiday doings; but as *la donna grossa*, who comes in to help scrub and chatter of a morning, assured our Maddalena, so soon even as six o'clock this day, scirocco does not mean rain and, when the clouds lie so languid on the hills, one may safely don the dress of woollen stuff, for the weather is too heavy even to let the water come down from its skies.

Maddalena's lady, *la padrona*, lives in a strange place near San Matteo. And San Matteo is considered so strange a quarter for the home of a widow who retains presence enough to have gallants still if she would, that fond relations and neighbours have actually been heard to say *la signora Marini* must be out of her mind. And yet the *quartiere S. Matteo*, if not fashionable, has beauties of its own. The little church is of old and beautiful design that stands with black and white marble façade on the piazza, and the gateway of the palace opposite is rich without in graceful and elaborate carving, sumptuous within by reason of a staircase weighty with ancient glory. But the widow does not live over the piazza nor in the grimy old palace. Behind S. Matteo's sanctuary is its cloister, no longer set aside for religious uses, no longer peopled by cowled monks or demure and whitehooded nuns, but the same for shy and tender

beauty as in the old days before Italy became a kingdom, and the Church's institutions had come to be held in ridicule. A carpenter's shop has grown into shape in the recesses of those sacred colonnades, and a carpenter's apprentice planes his lathes and sprinkles his shavings beneath the graceful arches, while around and looking down into the little grassgrown courtyard, tall houses stand in a quadrangle, and white linen hangs to dry against the time-tinted marble : but slender columns with twisted stem and fair carven capital still spring frankly from out a daintily moulden base around the green enclosure, and stand in their simple beauty through shade and sunshine of Italy.

And this is where the *padrona* lives. Our Maddalena has been with her for sole servant wench these seven years past. One day *la signora Marini* came to the town Orphan Asylum, or *Albergo dei Poveri*, as we call it, and there sought a child whom she might educate to domestic service. Maddalena knew nothing at first ; she was but thirteen years old and had had little teaching ; but, thanks to the thrifty housewife's pains and wholesome influence, assisted, as it surely was, by many a sharp word and friendly cuff, thanks also to her own bright wits, the little orphan grew rapidly into a servant of the quickest and deftest—into a maiden of the strongest and comeliest.

Not that Madalena was ever tall. Though, from their first frail babyhood, the poor little foundlings have the best care that such an institution as the *Albergo dei Poveri* can afford ; though they be plentifully nourished by sturdy peasant nurses, according to the country's custom ; yet a mother's care has never been theirs, nor have fresh field breezes ever fanned their cheeks, and strengthened



THE SERVANT WENCH.

their growing forms, such as may, perhaps, have greeted the first days of their lives. And so, though the little damsel be a pretty girl in her own style and fit for all life's work, she wears a sometimes wistful look behind her simple face, and will always be of small and dainty type, though of firm-knit frame and wholesome strength enough. She has a warmly tinted skin with rosy flush, and two round brown eyes wherein the sunlight could dance as it can dance on Mediterranean waves; but to-day—since the beams are hidden that can so brightly catch those blue sea-ripples when they like—curling black lashes veil the bright brown eyes, and they soften their glance and darken their sunlight into wistfulness.

It is three o'clock. The Mistress's soup has been cooked and eaten, the piece of dry boiled beef is removed at last from table, the dishes are washed up, the last reproof has been administered. Maddalena stands before her lady in all the glory of a new-patterned dress, with silk apron, silken-fringed kerchief, brightly glowing gold brooch and ear-drops, fresh *pezzotto*, whose white muslin folds drape her neck and shoulders—she is ready to go. All blunders and scoldings of five minutes ago are forgotten: the mistress is only a woman, and as a woman she sympathises. Has she not herself smoothed those black braids whose

plaits lie round so wondrously? Has she not placed the gold pins to secure the veil, and fastened the kerchief behind? 'Thou hast a good appearance, in truth,' she remarks, complacently gazing on her work—for Maddalena is her work, has been her work these years past—and the girl's blood kindles with pleasure at the praise: *la signora Marini* knows what's what, and would not, on *this* occasion, take the trouble to say what she did not mean!

The sky has not lightened with the growing day nor have the clouds taken their load off the mountains, the scirocco is still in the air, so that marble is less white and colour less brilliant along the streets, but the shadow is a tender shadow, and we do not mourn the searching sunlight. To-day is a great day at the Church of San Siro; the first communion has been given there this morning to hundreds of children, who now parade the streets in gala dress before going home to join in festivities of quite a secular nature. The girls have white dresses—satin, silk, or muslin, according to their degree, with bridal-seeming veils and flowers—the boys wear, probably, their first cloth suits and carry bouquets of flowers, of which they are half ashamed. Maddalena hurries on, smiling complacently. In every little white-robed girl she sees her own little niece, Tomasina, who has also been this morning at San Siro,

and in every escorting damsel behind she sees herself walking beside the mamma, for is not she the aunt of a first communion girl? It is not far from San Matteo to Via Luccoli, and soon the little servant has climbed a dark winding stair, has pulled a feeble bell-rope on the *5to piano*, has been admitted and warmly embraced by many female relations, in the midst of an admiring throng that is gathered round the little furbelowed and perfumed doll, who stands beside her mamma. ‘What luxury!’ says everybody, and congratulations pour from all sides upon the firstborn and the firstborn’s parents, who have thus safely borne her to years of discretion and the Church’s bosom. But she, poor infant, meanwhile, being but nine years old, listens wondering, and sure only of her new frock and her own importance, and of the comfits which are soon to be hers.

Voces rise shrill, and jokes fly merrily. Maddalena is not of the maddest among the guests. She stands now apart, softly conversing with a young man from Rivarolo, who keeps a baker’s shop, and is in no way to be despised. The shadow of the scirocco has not passed from her eyes, and the heavy lids lie but half folded away, with long lashes sweeping downwards; but the young man from Rivarolo does not seem to mind that sleepy gaze, and has just made up his mind that last Sunday shall not be the only time he follows a

little maiden into the church of Saint Ambrogio, when she goes to early mass! Now the board is spread in this large, scantily furnished hall, where the floor is of red brick and the walls of yellow cement, and the curtains of soft and faded calicoes; sixteen people sit down to eat *ravioli* and stewed beef and truffles, to drink sour *Monferrato* wine, and to break their teeth over hard sugar-plums. They are all very free and friendly, and talk loudly, all but Maddalena, who prefers to speak in whispers, but then she is sitting beside the baker. When the evening is over it is this same baker who walks with her slowly, in the darkness of eight o'clock, up the steep of Via Luccoli, and along the broad way of the Carlo Felice, till they reach the point where a narrow, brick-paved and rapid descent runs down into San Matteo. '*Brava!* thou com'st home to time,' says the mistress, when she opens the door to the servant-wench. And then they discuss the party and the presents, the viands, the dresses, the conversation, and all the scandal that can possibly be gathered from so humble an affair. 'Well, thou hast amused thyself; to-morrow there will be plenty to do, my child,' says the *padrona*, as maid and mistress retire to sleep.

And there *is* plenty to do indeed! *La signora Marini* has an entertainment in honour of her name-day, and *la signora Marini* likes to make a show, while being

at the same time economical. Mistress and maid climb the steep hill betimes in the morning to have the pick of the market produce in the Piazza San Domenico, and both are a good hand at a bargain and a better hand still at a little friendly wrangling to small purpose. Maddalena is all day long plucking fowls, shredding beans, sorting rice, washing lettuce, rolling paste, stirring *minestra*—graver kitchen duties the housewife attends to herself—and when the dinner is under way the hall must be swept, and the girl has her mistress's hair yet to do, and her own little slip-shod person to make neat! ‘*Dio, how the ribs ache!*’ says Maddalena, and while she says it the feeble door-bell tinkles—the guests are there!

Every man and woman, however, has a word and a jest for the serving-maid, which words and jests re-assure her a good deal, so that by the time the *padrona* is ready seated, among the company, at the long board with the coarse tablecloth, she is herself again, and, handing the viands, confidentially informs each guest of its chief ingredients, recommending her own favourites to favoured ones in the party. Only, when all are served and comfortably eating, Maddalena does not blush to sit down on the soiled old chintz settee with the vegetable dish in her lap. She can keep just as sharp a look-out over the wants of the table, and feels no way guilty of neglecting any duty—in fact, if

reproved would have known quite well how to answer that she had been on her feet all day and was tired. But no one makes any complaint. People, on the contrary, are not afraid to exchange a friendly word now and then with the winsome waitress ; and even when the guests are gone and the mistress goes into the kitchen to discuss the party's success, Maddalena gets no scolding, either for her freedom of manner in the dining-hall, nor because 'that young man of Rivarolo' is there, having been brought by a third party in the shape of the charwoman. Indeed the lady gives countenance to this affair by her presence, and when the house is locked up, and both are alone again for the night, the talk between them is just as much of '*him*' and his prospects as of the boiled beef and roasted capons, and of the success of the *tagliarini* as second course.

It is not a one-sided interest either. Maddalena has all her mistress's concerns just as much at heart, and the concerns of her mistress's aunts and uncles, and nieces and cousins as well. If the *tagliarini* had not been a success, or the lady had failed to get her due of compliment, the girl would have cried as copiously as when her own new dress was spoilt, the first time of wearing, by the water-squirts in the Pallavicini Garden at her sister's wedding ! And when *la signora Marini* had on that violet silk just new for the Corpus Domini procession,

Maddalena could not refrain from a friendly ejaculation when she opened the street door to her—even though two strange gentlemen had accompanied her back from church! It is she who greases and plaits her lady's hair on occasions less grand than those for which *la pettinatrice*—or female hair-dresser—is summoned. Maddalena can do a little of everything, and everything quite passably well, from the mending of a bell-rope with a hairpin to the crimping and ironing of fine muslins, the coiling of plaits, the stewing of fowls, the rolling of paste, the sweeping of rooms, and last, but certainly not least, the nursing of sick folk. When *la padrona*'s aunt had the typhus, who so deft, so patient, and so tender as the little servant wench? And when the child of the first-floor lodger had to have leeches put on for inflammation, did not the doctor say that he couldn't have done it better himself than did Maddalena? To which she had answered, 'No—nor half so well, being but a miserable man.' Of course she must needs have her cryings, and scoldings, and ill-humours, and many is the time she has vowed to run away from the home she loves so well; but when all's said and done there is surely no happier place than the *4to piano* of that house in S. Matteo where mistress and maid live, and laugh and cry and squabble so thoroughly.

## Il Negoziente.

### The Shopman.

CARNIVAL has been and gone, Lent is over and Easter festivals, with sunny smile, have opened the gate to Spring. Upon the country that spreads around our goodly Riviera city, the flush of almond blossoms still lies rosily, to fade soon into the paler tones of pear and apple and cherry bloom. The trees are budding, to help with their faint green for contrast, but the green that is fullest at this time lies over the fresh, brown earth, where spring crops have come to life and are growing fast in the keen, sunlit air. Nursery gardens spread fair and far about the town, with little white and trellis-covered cottages in their midst for the husbandmen —gardens that have neat furrows intersecting them for water-supply, and that make a rich show in market produce. This is towards Albaro, on Genoa's eastern side, and the low front of Albaro's hill is adorned with many a white old palace and the slender columns of marble *loggias* that are fresco-painted within. From the town's ramparts these many marble buildings have

a great effect, that stand amidst green gardens, with roofs lying upon a bright sky, and—walking along the straight and dusty road that makes, towards the sunrise, for the sea-shore, and is flanked on both sides with arbutus trees—the white colonnades of the *Paradiso* palace are before you all the time to make you remember for ever after the look of marble arches on a green hill-side and a strong blue sky.

Among the streets the spring cannot make itself quite so well remembered, nor can the sun have such an effect, but here, as elsewhere, April, May, and even March have quite another beauty from January. The sunlight is dashed even across the dark narrowness of Via San-Luca, and streams across the Piazza Soziglia to light upon the very counter of Signor Giordano's shop. Surely bargains must be the less sharply driven, and the smiles of fair purchasers the more persuasive ! But then Tuesday is the night of *la marchesa Bice's* ball, and one must make one's profit when one can, for in a small town, where the people are proverbially stingy, 'tis not every day that business is to be done !

*Il Signor Giordano* is a great man in Genoa. He has the largest shop for the novelties of fashion, and is moreover almost the only one of the first *negozianti* who go to London as well as to Paris for spring and autumn modes. On the other hand, he is not *too* expensive !

He has his own interest at heart, of course, but he thinks to further it better by a judicious lowness of price than by an assumption of foreign exorbitance, as some others do. Then he is not impervious to female flattery, and something can be done with him in this wise! The windows of Signor Giordano's shop are of plate-glass. Years ago there were no shops in Genoa that had plate-glass for windows, that had any windows at all in fact, just as there were no *cittadine*, or cabs, in the streets, and private carriages were so few that one could tell them all apart by their liveries: just as there were no gas lanterns but only oil lamps in the public thoroughfares. Even now the shops that have real plate-glass windows are few enough, and those that have them so broad and so fine as Signor Giordano are fewer still. His premises are large, large for a provincial town of Italy—and his young shopmen are civil, his goods deftly displayed in the window; all these advantages go to make the store in Via Soziglia one of the town's favourites. So to-day it is well beset with female customers—prudent and economical mammas, eager daughters, placidly lavish young matrons, who are the most acceptable of all to Signor Giordano—everybody wants some adornment, great or small, for the coming festivity. A neat brougham stops at the door, whence there steps a slim-figured and pale-faced little dame, tastefully dressed

in the latest of Paris fashions. ‘It is the *Contessa Capramonte, per Bacco*,’ says the foreman in the front shop to the great Signor Giordano, who is reading his *Corriere* behind. [The *Corriere* is the great mercantile paper.] ‘Excellent! Show her those new gauzes that we had last night;’ then advancing to meet this most graceful of customers, ‘Your servant, madam,’ bows the vender of fashions to their wearer; ‘what might be your ladyship’s pleasure this afternoon?’

And soon the hopeful comer is on the usual high wooden stool before the counter, all the new Paris gauzes displayed for her choice, with a dark and tall and perfumed young man to show them off, and the proprietor himself close at hand to take advice of, to jest and chat with besides, as these Italian ladies are never afraid to jest with their social inferiors. ‘Pretty,’ ejaculates she, admiringly, as the tall young man crushes and drapes a citron-coloured gauze the better for the sunlight to catch and beautify it! ‘But with that stuff I shall need a silk dress of the colour besides; it will cost me too much!’ ‘Truly your ladyship has the love of fun,’ laughs fat Signor Giordano at her elbow; ‘we know pretty well what the *Contessa Capramonte* has for money!’ ‘Truly,’ pouts the pretty lady; ‘you are a good husband one can see. Do you not reflect on the face which that sour-visaged Count will make when I

bring him the bill, and have no more money, of the poor pittance he gives me, to pay it with? Oh, but *I* must reflect upon it, however!' 'The bill will not arrive yet awhile, and then, when the Signor Conte sees your ladyship in that dress, whose colour fits so perfectly to the complexion, which is the talk of our town——!' 'Come, have a care,' laughs the lady back again, but with no foolish blush. Then considering, while the fatal look of indecision comes slowly to her pretty face, 'for the rest you are right, Signor Giordano; no colour suits me so well, and with an assortment of tea-roses——' 'And the diamonds of the Capramonte family,' puts in the great man, dexterously. 'Yes, with the diamonds, perhaps,' ruminates she. 'Holy Madonna! it will be a sight for men to come from far and wide to see,' murmurs the gauze vendor, fervently, and the dark youth ejaculates, 'I believe it!' as he is paid to do.

'Well, I suppose I must,' sighs the customer, and then there comes a question of quantity, and the Signor Giordano's advice is again required about the number of metres for skirt, tunic, scarf and bodice, the which great matter cannot be decided until the manner of making have also been chosen, for *la Contessa* says that for economy she is going to have this dress made at home by her maid! It is pretty well certain the

matter will be settled and unsettled over again at least twenty times by maid and mistress when the latter gets home, but meanwhile it pleases her to discuss it with the shopman, so forty metres are at last pronounced to



SHOPMAN AND PURCHASER.

be the necessary amount, and the lady can always have more afterwards, remarks the perfumed shop-youth with appropriate judgment.

'Two francs a metre, you said, did you not?' asks

the Countess, innocently, watching the soft silk stuff being measured out. ‘Dear madam, no ; three francs,’ corrects Signor Giordano with all suavity, and still the pale-coloured folds pass quickly through the hands of the tall young man. His thumb is on the great scissors, he has counted the forty metres, but ‘Stop, stop !’ cries the lady’s eager voice ; ‘I must do without the dress, then—for certainly all *that* money, 120 francs, *Dio*, never shall I obtain it from my husband ! Pity,’ adds she, rising gracefully, and replacing the high stool in its place, ‘for the colour suits me to perfection, and the stuff pleases me ; this satin stripe is new, and looks well—but 120 francs—heaven forbid !’ ‘Eh, well,’ concedes the shopman, glancing at his humble satellite over the counter, ‘what do you think ? For such a customer it would be worth while to make a reduction, is it not true ? She would make such a figure, *per Bacco !* Let us make it two francs and eighty centimes. For *you* I will make a sacrifice,’ adds *il Signor Giordano*, with an admiring bow, ‘only’—and this in a lower tone—‘her ladyship will not mention the price.’ The concession is indifferently well received. Scoffs the customer, with a pretty toss of her small head, ‘I do not jest ! Two francs a metre, or else I buy my dress elsewhere ; and if I cannot find another to my taste, I stay at home to-morrow night.’ This is said poutingly,

and master and man utter at once a deprecating ejaculation. ‘Two francs !’ pleads the former; ‘sweet lady, I couldn’t do it ! If heaven had but been more generous to me, how proudly would I have made a gift of the thing which has been fortunate enough to please you, but——’ ‘Preposterous !’ laughs the beauty, ‘what a good thing that I know you ! Well—make it two francs and thirty *centesimi* ! You will not ? Oh, well, I find my dress easily elsewhere. And there are to be many ladies of great beauty at *la marchesa’s* on Tuesday night. I should have required silk for the skirt too !’ These parting shafts are sent home as the lady retreats gracefully to the door. ‘*Addio*,’ nods she, and the plate-glass swings to behind her, the citron-coloured gauze is folded away off the counter. Yet both vendor and purchaser know well enough it will be out again in a trice, and addressed, moreover, to the Palazzo Capramonte.

So sure, in fact, is the shopman of this that when, five minutes later, another and less constant customer sees, admires, and would purchase that frail fabric, he is not afraid positively to state that forty *metri* of it are sold to the Contessa Capramonte ; he is not ashamed either, when asked the price by this next customer, to give it only as two francs and fifty *centesimi*, but then this second lady is a foreigner, and will not bargain, and the Signor Giordano knows exactly how much to put on,

because he knows how much a Genoese lady will have off before she buys. Is it waste of time? Not at all, the shopman will tell you—only part of the day's work.

The *Contessa* walks leisurely from Soziglia down the Via de' Orefici, and goes into a jeweller's shop in this jewellers' street, where, over lumps of pale pink coral and finely-wrought trinkets of silver and gilt-silver filigree, she plays her play over again, to come out triumphant with a necklace, whose dainty lumps and loops and wires are cunningly fashioned into leaves and roses. The necklace is not for herself, for a Genoese lady despises the produce of that darkly, strangely winding street, where the booths stand out freely to view, and glitter with the light silver wares, or are rich with the red heavy coral; but bargaining comes to her as second nature, so she has fought none the less bravely over the trinket because the commission is for a foreign friend. Thoughts of that dress have not strayed from her mind all the same, and before the *Contessa* drives out of Soziglia the citron gauze has been purchased for two francs and fifty *centesimi* the *metro*, which was the exact sum on which Signor Giordano meant they should meet from the beginning; and silk to match, and flowers, and ribbons have been added to the bill, all for something more than the one, for something less than the other said at first. So *la Contessa* goes home to her

palace at Carignano, where banksia roses are blooming against the wall, and pink and white fruit-blossoms in the *villa*, while a purple Judas-tree is a-flower before the house. And the Signor Giordano goes home to the flat in Castelletto, where, though it is five storeys high, flowers still bloom upon the terrace and over the *pergola*, for winter is past, and we are in spring-time.

## La Pettinatrice.

### The Hairdresser.

MARRINA has her hands full to-day ; for though it is quite too hot for early May—so hot that the first whiteness and crispness of a *pezzotto* is gone before the week is out—there is to be a ball to-night, and a ball in the sad old halls of the deserted Royal Palace ; the king is coming to Genoa—the king and the people's favourite, our much-loved Princess Margherita. Even the sparing Genoese do not grudge a little money to be brightest and happiest on such an occasion. The people and the shops are gay—the very streets, and walls, and houses seem to shine with joy of the prospect ; illuminations are preparing in the public ways, the stalls of the *fioraje* are well stocked, and on the Acquasola the trees are a-flower, bright with green and wide spreading, the air is sweet with acacia-scent and laburnum. Marrina lives without the city's gates, on the side towards the great cemetery. Why she lives there, who knows, as she often says ? For, although the way into town is not further than even a buxom woman, like herself, can comfortably do

in half-an-hour, it is more trouble than it is worth, this being obliged to pick up one's petticoats, and turn out along the dusty highway every blessed morning of one's life—whether the sun be hot or the *Tramontana* bleak—just to coil, and plaster, and construct aloft those heavy black masses of the Signora De Maroni's hair! But, then, if one always had a reason for everything one did, *Madonna*, life would be a purgatory indeed! This is Marrina's philosophy, and, indeed, the rents are not so high without the walls, and one has a breath for one's money in summer time, if a colder blast in winter.

This morning there is little room for complaint of any sort. The weary-white valley of the Bisagno opens out to the sea, and is, perhaps, not beautiful in itself, because the shingle of its river's bed lies around so wide with so small a thread of water in its midst; but, on either side of it, and beyond the dusty roads which hem its margin, green slopes rise gently with palaces on their sides where they are nearest the town, and with fruit trees in blossom and chestnut trees in leaf, on the opposite slopes of Albaro, which the market gardens of *manenti* make green the sooner. Pinkest peach bloom is over, but the cherry and the pear, and the tender-toned apple-blossom have not cast all their flowers yet, while the may and the blackthorn spread

white and pink patches on hedge-rows inland, and, on the mossy turf of the Quesia Valley some two miles ahead, violets bloom beneath bright chestnut trees, and primroses on banks and boulders, faint narcissus breathes a scent where the air plays freely, and cowslips hang their heads in the sunshine. *La Pettinatrice* does not often see these things, it is true, for her own house stands nearer town upon the high road, where the Bisagno is thick with the soap-suds of many washerwomen who flog clothes upon hard flint, as they stand in its stream. But she has an aunt who lives up there where the water flows clean, and glides off mill-wheels into deep, green pools, and she has plucked the faintly streaked tulips from out the new spring wheat, and she knows the bloom of the fruit trees, though she is a town woman born and bred.

The dust lies thick on the road ; although the summer has scarce begun, the sun shines hotly down, and Marrina is minded to spend two *soldi* that she may escape both dust and heat in a very insecure and closely-packed conveyance that runs to the Virgin's gate of Porta Pila. Yet the sun is on Marrina's broad back worse than ever, the dust whirls in her face from the open door and the flies are numerous, but a little altercation with the omnibus inmates makes up for all this and more. There is a man who carries the most fragrant of truffles with

stale fish in a basket, and another who has just eaten freely of garlic and onions, but both of them discourse well with the comely *pettinatrice*, and she finds no fault in them. Marrina is a well-preserved woman of some thirty years. She is, perhaps, a little more showy-looking than



LA PETTINATRICE IN AN OMNIBUS.

some, even of the town-women of her age—that comes from her life amongst many classes, and a little also because Marrina has no husband, no home of her own, and no children. She has a shapely figure, that is a little too short for its size, a full round throat which the sun

has burnt brown, a face that is one shade whiter than the throat, and a fine head of black crimped hair, whereon her own craft is amply displayed ; her mouth is large, with full red lips and white teeth, her cheeks are rosy, her eyes twinkle proudly, and she wears white thread stockings and black shoes ; her petticoats set out richly from her broad hips, her dress is gaily patterned, her kerchief falls aside a little at the neck, her hands are plump and smooth.

The gate-keeper at Porta Pila, the host of the Osteria degli Amici, at the corner, the woman who sells fried fish two steps further on, all greet *la pettinatrice* as she comes across the drawbridge, with swinging gait, to turn up the first road on the right. La Signora De Maroni is the first to have her hair dressed, for she is a constant customer ; but other thoughts and wider plans are rife in Marrina's brain to-day, and she bestows but scant attention on this lady's well-greased plaits. The morning's unfailing gossip loses none of its excellence, however, for the grist is more rather than less plentiful to the mill. 'Does *vossignoria* call to mind the linendraper's wife who used to rent the little house with the *pergola* here above the convent ?' 'That little red-haired one ? Well, what of her ?' demands the lady sharply. She is a fine woman for her years, and has a handsome pile of hair, but *hers* is black, which is common-

place, and besides the linendraper's wife is ten years younger ! Marrina knows all this. ‘*Giusto*,’ she answers glibly, ‘what a wit your worship has, to be sure ! Red it is—red enough to scare the devil ! Well, they've made a failure, they don't live up here ; they've only got a bit of a place now—you should see what a misery—down in Via Giulia !’ ‘Truly,’ murmurs La Signora De Maroni, well pleased. ‘I should think she wouldn't be on the Acquasola to see the Princess, then ?’ ‘I believe you, she won't,’ laughs Marrina, crimping a poor handful of front hair as she speaks ! Then, taking a hairpin from between her teeth, where it has been held for convenience, and placing it firmly through the towering structure of her victim's head, ‘She's too vain to show herself without a new silk dress ! It's quite ridiculous at her age ! If it were yourself now, one would understand !’ ‘Go away with you,’ laughs the flattered dame, now holding the hot irons ready, to have the little flat curls of long usage made and plastered upon her forehead ! ‘Yes, yes, it is true,’ continues Marrina, ‘and yet what is youth good for, I say ? Only to play the fool. See there that new bride of Signor Parini, the goldsmith ! People made such a noise of her youth and her beauty—only fourteen years old, and a wife ! Well, how does she use it ? Not been a mother three months, and a mere chit of sixteen as she is, before they do say — and *la pettinatrice's* voice

sinks to an impressive whisper which la Signora De Maroni alone is able to hear.

But the daily erection is done, and Marrina has no time for gossip this morning. ‘Does *vossignoria* go to the opera to-night to see the Princess?’ she asks, rolling down her sleeves again. ‘Eh, *povera me!* No, indeed I do not,’ answers the lady! ‘Not even for a joke could I persuade that wretch of a De Maroni to hire me a box! And he that everyone tells me is so rich. Shame on him!’ Marrina laughs loudly. ‘They are all so, those husbands,’ she says. ‘The Virgin defend *me* from one!’ And with a ‘*dunque domani*,’ she is gone. La Signora De Maroni has neither so interesting a head nor so interesting a conversation as many whose hair she will do this day, for Marrina has twisted and combed and greased those black locks every morning for the last five years; so, swiftly running down the ninety-four dark and dirty steps, perhaps not with the lightest of footfalls, she is glad to greet the cobbler again, who stitches in the portico, and to be out in the spring air. There are two more subscribing clients to be finished off, and after that who knows how many chance heads of ladies who are going to the Princess’s ball?

The next customer lives up one of the fine new streets. She is not so rich as the De Maroni, but she is noble, and has better hair—hair that it’s a pleasure to

stick the pins into, as *la pettinatrice* has been heard to say. Lilacs are blooming, with snowy guelder roses behind the tall railings of private gardens in Via Serra, and the banksia buds have grown so wildly that their long and flowering sprays fall back over the wall into the street. Marrina plucks a blossom with which to greet her customer. It is not hers to pluck, but why should that signify, any more than it can signify she should make fun of the *bourgeoise* De Maroni with this younger and prettier rival of the aristocracy, telling of the grey hairs that lie underneath, if only you lift the well-greased black ones, and of how that old husband of hers refused to spend his money to take her to the opera. 'And with reason,' says Marrina for comment; 'if the poor devil must needs spend money, 'tis natural he should prefer to spend it for a pretty face.' Then the lady laughs, and quite agrees, and they fall to the discussion of this one and that one—for this customer is young, and has her many gallants, and Marrina is always very useful for gossip and scandal. *La signora* is going to the opera, and then to the ball—not with her husband, of course—and must needs consult Marrina about her toilet, for a *pettinatrice* sees the costume of many a fine lady, and can advise so as to make or to mar many an evening's happiness.

On this occasion the pretty countess gets many a

hint, and knows what most of the *marchese* will wear to-night, so that she is able still to devise—with *la pettinatrice's* help—some extravagance that shall outvie them all. Fortunately for her, she is a favourite with Marrina, and may trust just a little more to the discretion of Marrina's tongue than all the poor ladies who confided the secret of their toilets to her yesterday—because, though her hands will work amongst hair till far into the coming night, Marrina dressed many a head yester eve, whose owner sat upright in a chair till this morning—nor thought anything of it—for appearance sake! ‘Amuse yourself, Signora Contessa, and have a care for that poor little marquis of last week, now that you have a new gallant,’ says Marrina, deftly placing the last pile. ‘*Dio*, what time I waste with you,’ adds she, as the church clock strikes! And she is down the stair, down the street almost with the thought, and out into the flower-strewn Acquasola, where the air is flushed with summer sunshine, and waxen blossoms stand stiffly amid the broad leaves of horse-chestnuts in the sloping avenue. La Marchesa Tagliafico lives on the Salita dei Cappucini, where she can see the flowering creepers against the tall old wall of the Villetta de' Negri opposite, that is now the new Acquasola, where she can hear the rush of the cascade, and scent the limes and acacias off the public-gardens, and watch the nobility driving round of a warm

Sunday evening ; where she is close to the ancient Church of the Cappucini, besides, and can stand beneath its cypresses two minutes after leaving home, to visit its *Presepio* at Epiphany or its *Santo Sepolcro* in Holy Week, to hear its *Frati Predicatori*, to attend mass and buy waxen images on all or any of the *festas*. La Marchesa is one of the devout ; nevertheless she is to be at the ball to-night, and Marrina is to do her hair.

Even *la pettinatrice's* goodly strength is well-nigh spent and her fingers greased to the bone, before the last head is finished off, for, in spite of her only having taken half-an-hour's rest to see the Princess drive round the gardens, it is midnight long past when the final touch is put to the final Marchesa. The day's work is over, but Marrina does not go home to the tall house on the dusty road beyond Porta Pila. She too must have her night's recreation. Who would expect the love of folly to be spent in a woman of that figure and those eyes, even though her calendar count thirty birth-days ? But after the gas-lit night, the summer sunshine still comes back, bright and pure, and fresh apple-blossoms blow beside *la pettinatrice's* home.

## Fisher-Folk.

WHEN the high road of the eastern Riviera has left the town behind a space, and has even travelled clear of the last palaces without the walls of the city of marbles—when it has crossed that tongue of Albaro's Hill that divides the waves, and, having left sea behind in Genoa's Bay, comes back to more sea that laps freely upon a free and rocky coast—when it has coiled closely round corners and skirted precipices for many a mile—it comes, on its way, across a little town where the hills rise abruptly behind, and the orange groves are thick around, and the villas of nobles lie sumptuously upon the shore.

There have been many little towns, scarcely larger than villages, all along the road from Porta Pila, and many a lovely palace standing in its garden and fruit-groves along the coast—so many, indeed, that even a quarter of a mile has not been left untenanted by mankind; but Nervi is a prettier place than any of the other places since Albaro's villas were left behind. The hills that stand for background to it are straight hills and fairly wooded, yet they are not the best fea-

tures in its beauty, for, excepting from the sea, no one has seen their shapes impressively, so close do they rise, looking down upon the village. Nervi's loveliness is in her gardens, with the palms and pines that grow there, and the stately palaces whose time-tinted marble walls stand in the midst; it is in her lemon orchards and orange groves, where the breeze blows laden with scent in the flowering time, and the pale or golden fruit hangs heavily-gorgeous through the early spring days; it is in her rocky beach, where the changing sea laps for ever and is never the same, where fishers spread their nets, and children wade and play, and the wonderful water-line is broken and perilous because of the cloven rocks that lie guarding it.

The little straight street is not beautiful, though its barber and dressmaker and its *Fabbrica di paste* be indispensable to the dwellers round about, and though dirty shops and tall houses, because strange, have often been called picturesque; the Mediterranean lies hid from Nervi's street, and, when one is on the Riviera the Mediterranean is the thing most powerful to charm. But, on the sea-shore, street and barber and shops are forgotten. The sun gleams on white wave-crests that temper the sea's blue on some breezy spring day; the sun lies scorching the weed-grown jagged rocks, the sloping slate rocks that slide far down beneath water that

grows green near shore ; the sun sweetens the oranges, and makes the flowers more luscious of scent, and the fishermen lay their nets. Though Nervi is a village where rich folk have their dwellings and marble steps lead down to the water for bathing, there are hamlets near around, of poorly squalid mien and strangest name, where fisher-folk live and fisher-children hunt crabs and shell-fish in the bays.

Walking along the winding way that creeps round the lip of little gulfs, and dives into dark crevices of crags—or along the way that, being poised midway aloft upon the cliff some hundred feet above the water, leads from Nervi to the fishing village of Bogliasco—you might see Maso, perhaps, out at sea in his broad and tanned old boat, spreading nets for the night's fishery, or, further on, from off the smoother shingle, Paolo pushing out upon the coming wave, with the children standing by to help with shout and laughter, and the women with parting joke or reproof.

May is near to her end now, and the long evenings make summer again. The water is warm, because the sun has lain upon it all day, and blue with a memory of the clouds overhead, that are paling now in the waning lights. A golden glamour comes down upon the waves ; the sun is near to setting. Paolo stands in the sea, making ready to push off ; his brown, broad

feet upon the yellow shingle are broader, but not browner, beneath the green water that reaches to his knee where the striped hose rolls up ; the golden light strikes across his face on its way to the bright group upon shore and to the bright spring green over the hill beyond. He is a tall man and strongly built, but his face is battered and seamed ; they call him in the fishery ‘the furrowed one,’ but he is liked well enough notwithstanding, and, truly, that careworn face has a kindling eye and an honest smile. Paolo is a married man. That mischievous urchin is his own first-born, who leans against the boat with his calves in deep water—as the calves of the rising generation are apt to be ; his hard young hands are eager to help, his keen black eyes look for the signal. And that is Paolo’s wife—that broad-hipped woman with the full, free figure, who waits upon the beach with the swaddled infant in one arm and the year-old boy clinging to her skirt ; all the other children play around, they are waiting to see father away.

Now his ropes are coiled, his nets are in order ; Gian-Battista has arrived leisurely—Paolo’s lazy nephew, who helps in the fishery. When his lighter skiff has also been made ready, two strong pairs of hands—that nine-year-old boy helping lustily—start both old crafts out to sea. Paolo leaps in swiftly, the oars are dipped, and the golden sun sinks a little lower upon the horizon. ‘An-

*diamo bambini!*" calls Maddalena shrilly, only she calls it in strangest dialect, to the loitering children. And by the time she has dragged the younger and driven the elder up the short, steep slope of beach on to the jagged rocks beyond, that lie beneath the village, the boats have pulled a mile out to sea, and Paolo has sunk his nets for the tunny fishery.



PAOLO AT SEA.

Some two hundred yards and more each of them spreads around ; you may see the little brown bobbins, that mark the circumference, float and jerk up and down on the water as Gian-Battista spreads his end of net, rowing across the marked space meanwhile ; then the two boats lie sentinels at either end, to guard their sacred surface from other craft, and to watch for the haul. So when the time has come, and the watching has been

long enough, calling to one another across the space with deep, loud voices that are tempered to softness as they travel over the water, Paolo and Battista begin slowly to row towards the net's centre with the net's ends fastened to their separate boats, and, when they meet in the middle, the net's mouth will have closed upon the captured fish.

There are not many this time. When Battista has got into his uncle's boat, and when together, with cheery cry and many a passing ejaculation, they have hauled in the great net, it is but a *cattiva pesca* that is the result of their evening's labour. And the sun has gone down now behind the purple clouds and beneath the waves ; the sea's blue is dark, almost to blackness, as the night breeze creeps up ; Sestri's coast can no longer be seen—scarce even the great promontory that hides La Spezia from sight in the daytime. Yet further out to sea they lay down the net again, and little lanterns have had to be lighted in either boat, other lights and lanterns have been long put out that glimmered faintly from the village ashore, before Paolo and Battista row back again towards the rock-bound bay beneath the cliff. But a dying memory of sunset from the west can still light the boats homewards though the summer night be far advanced, and, against the background of this dim and distant brightness, Paolo's tall figure stands taller than

before as he waits, with forward foot and well-poised body, upon the boat's prow, till the shingle shall grind beneath her keel, and it be time to leap out into shallow water and pull her high upon the yellow beach. Maddalena's shrill voice is hushed, the children are all a-bed and the hearth swept up ; but, if the fire be spent, the fisher's meal has not been forgotten by the fisher's wife ; cold *polenta*, brown bread and chestnuts stand ready by the settle, though the portly fishwife lies asleep whose work it will be to bear the haul of tunny-fish to early market.

The morning dawns, pure and bright. Beneath the *pergolas* of Bogliasco cottages the sun is warm already, though night-dews lie wet still on flowers and herbage. The blue water below laps but gently against the gnarled rocks where it can dash at will so wildly, for the sea is calm to-day under a tender sky. ‘It will be hot,’ fisherwives say, ‘but what will you have when June days are so near?’ Scarce a ripple stirs the water surface, whose blue is as only the Mediterranean’s blue can be when the sky is full of colour as now, and the sun is strong to perfect and enhance. Paolo has been abroad betimes, and Maddalena is already on her way to the fish-market with last evening’s produce ; but we, who have not cared to rise so early, will follow Maso this time, who, having neither wife nor children, begins only to fish when the sun is aloft.

Maso has not so handsome a fame as he who stood last night against the sunset. In fact, he is an ugly man, for, besides a face that is brown and weather-beaten, and pitted with the small-pox (as his nickname in the village dialect would tell you), he has a short, wiry figure, that for all its ease of movement cannot compare with the tall, spare grace of his neighbour. Maso had wonderful luck with the *bianchette*, that are a kind of whitebait, through the past month of April, and he had a good net of anchovies some three days ago ; but anchovies are not the surest sport, and this morning he will lay for the sardines, as Paolo has done. Maso has a little brother—a brisk, lithe little ragamuffin of ten years, one of those who rarely have time for aught but mischief, as his keen eyes would tell you ; him he sends up on the hill for watch. And while the two men—for the fishing is all done in couples, and Maso has a comrade like the rest—while the men spread their nets just beyond the rocks in the creek's clear water below, Giannino's bare feet have climbed the hill where the stones were sharpest for his long toes to cling to, and is squatting on the hot earth amid the thyme and the flowers and beneath the grey-toned olives, between the frail network of whose boughs those blue waves shine with fairest glory.

But Giannino notes none of the things of Na-

ture ; he is watching the sardine shoals come on. Maso and the other have parted company in their separate boats now ; each is posted at an opposite side, with a net's end fastened to his skiff. And presently Giannino, from behind the olive trees, sees a goodly company of little slim and silvery fish making towards that very pool of clearest blue-green water, where the cruel snare lies spread in the rock's great shade. A silent signal is enough to the fishers, who are watching for it, and the boats row slowly centre-wards, till the net's mouth has closed upon the dainty prisoners. Silver and gold gleam in the sun's own silver light, for the little fish struggle pitifully amid those horrible meshes. It has been a *buona pesca* this time, and the brown and dingy coils are soon in the boat, the spoil secured safely within the well. It is Nicoletta who goes to market with the sardines ; but not into town, only to Bogliasco, where men and women buy the fish from the fishers, to take into Genoa. Nicoletta is a spare and tanned little maiden, with brown feet and ankles that have never known shoes or stockings ; she is sister to Maso and Giannino, but it is the latter she resembles in her wild, wiry strength, for she, too, is something of a pickle !

The sun climbs the sky till its rays are so hot that even Riviera men and women are fain to fly from it for an hour or so, while they eat the *merenda*, and sleep

their own calm sleep beneath the shadows of rock or fig-tree. The olives shine silver-white in the fair beams that ripen their fruit; aloes and palms flourish, broad pines are darkly green and perfumed; in bays and upon burning rocks the colour-laden water ebbs quietly. But at last the sun sets again, and in the evening's cool, fishers sink the lobster baskets in rock-bound pools of the coast, where the water is nigh to blackness in its depth beside the cliffs. Night is near, and the sea's colour fades awhile with the last of the sunlight.

## Santa Margherita.

SANTA MARGHERITA is one of the many little towns which have gradually grown up along the eastern Riviera, gathering themselves together around the country palace of some *signore*, which, first, had been built alone upon the shore, or springing up where, for convenience sake, a little fishing hamlet had been set in creek or bay, until now the whole of the coast line from Genoa to La Spezia is studded thickly with the white walls and glistening roofs of human habitations. The little place has had a station since the railroad has come this way—a station of its own, and not one shared with another village, as some of its neighbours, and one, too, at which all the trains must stop which run during the day to Sestri. There was a great palace built up here many years ago. I forget to what family it belongs, but it is a stately pile, whose marble steps creep down to the water's edge, and on whose battered face the dim colours of ancient frescoes still show quaintly through the dirt which has encrusted them. The *signori* used to come here for the sea-bathing, and perhaps it was in this wise that the

town of Santa Margherita came to be built. Nevertheless it is in a fair position upon the coast, and it was probably a prosperous little fishing village long before it could boast its stone pavements and its piazza of now-a-days. The coast swerves in gently so as to form a smooth and ample bay just where the town stands, and jutting out on either side into the blue waves stand two promontories guarding the gulf. To the right is Porto Fino, and, within the bay round the point, a little village bears the name. It is so called from the many dolphins which, near to that shore, sport in bevvies beneath the clear water quickly to disperse at the approach of a boat. 'Fino,' for shortness and convenience sake, apparently can mean *delfino*.

Hills, graceful and undulating, clothed with many trees and watered by many a cool stream, are set against the sky for background, and Santa Margherita lies within their lap, sending the gayest houses to adorn her front upon the coast. Buildings of any note belonging to the place are but few—only the Campanile, which stands up tall against the hill, and has some pretty colouring in the mosaic of its belfry, and one or two decrepit old mansions belonging to the gentry of the neighbourhood. The great palace of which we have already spoken stands upon a low hill without the town ; orange groves gather round and about it, and woods where dark and spreading

pines are set against the tenderer foliage of chestnuts and arbutus: its white loggias and colonnades face the sea, hung richly with creepers and vines. In the town there are many poorer houses—most of them modern--tall and thinly built, with ill-designed proportions, and



VIEW OF SANTA MARGHERITA.

gaudily coloured paintings nowise resembling the frescoes of olden times. Along the façade of the town houses stand closely wedged together whose windows are thickly studded up and down, and hung with the white linen from which meaner habitations in Italy are rarely unadorned. This is the most populous part of Santa

Margherita, and between these houses and the waters of the bay there is only the paved street from whence steps lead to the higher part of the town, the railway station and the fair country beyond. Here roads branch out on all sides ; one leads from behind the town, over the hill to more towns and villages inland, another is hemmed by tall rows of ilexes, and others again, less important, creep up the clefts of the valley until they are lost in the woods, and only peep out again on the barren crests of mountains, where pine trees alone stand as fringes against the sky.

Santa Margherita is but one of a hundred nooks along the Cornice from Nice to La Spezia ; the villages all breathe the same balmy sea air and bask in the same sunshine, and wear the same garb of luxuriant vegetation, of quaint picturesqueness, side by side with gaudy vulgarity ; and yet each has its own life, each is home, as no other place can be to its citizens. Santa Margherita, like the rest, has its full sum of incongruity. Squalid habitations that yet have something of the grace of Italy, with their green shutters, large windows, and marble mosaic floors, stand, in dirt and poverty, side by side with stately palaces of olden time or with the pretentious structures of modern architecture. And in the inhabitants is the same apparent discord. Men and women who for years have been used to exact the homage of

their inferiors, live side by side with the lowest and the poorest of the people, and, even more, with a perfect grace and courtesy ; ladies to whom fashion is a necessity, and excitement has become a second nature, take a naïve pleasure in the pursuits and interests of poor fisherwives, of *contadine* cooking the porridge, or lace-weavers at their pillow.

And nature is there to keep all this strange medley in countenance. Down upon the beach, where the fishers stow their craft when the day's work is over at sea, and where the little dark-eyed children, ragged and dirty, play in and out the nets upon the shingle, the wind blows hot from off the great moving plain of the Mediterranean and the sun shines heavily for many an hour upon the houses and groves and gardens that are on the water's level. Leave the town a space, and take one of those roads which lead upward among the mountain valleys, and in a little half-hour the face of nature seems subtly to have changed, and her voice tells a different tale, while yet murmuring of the sea which is near. The summer breeze is scarcely cooler or the sun's rays less powerful where they break between the large-leaved foliage of the chestnuts, yet a sense of freshness creeps silently around, vigour is in the flowers that grow, in the trees, in the water that flows and ripples. Ferns are tall and waving upon the banks of little rills

and beside cascades, or frail and feathery growing between the crevices of loose stone walls. Maiden-hair is there in profusion, and hart's-tongue and holly fern, besides many others. The ways are rough and stony, sometimes losing themselves in what seems to be but a mere water-course, sometimes steeply climbing the hills in tortuous coils ; but even these rough footpaths look upon fair valleys, and the pale sky is spread out above them, till they reach the mountain's summit and wind round again upon its crown back towards the whispering sea. And now you will enter upon the region of stone pines, and this is the promontory of Porto Fino. The goodly trees rise up from out soft earth, and their straight stems, with the curiously carved bark, stand tall and erect, many feet on high, ere the branches begin gracefully to strike out on the several sides. Then the boughs grow more forked and multiply again, and still there are no leaves yet to be seen, only when you look up from below you see that there is a great shade spread above you, and that all those thickly matted branches are clothed and adorned with the dark and sweet-scented foliage. Then you sit down, perhaps, in the dreamy cool and the twilight of this forest—where the trees do not need to be thickly set that they may throw their shadows densely—and you breathe the heavy-perfumed air from the pines, while you hear from afar the murmur of the sea.

These pine trees can grow on the narrowest ledges of soil that have found a place up the face of the cliffs, and can yet stretch their branches far out over the waves, so that the most barren edge of land by them is made beautiful and softened. And all the time, perhaps, that you have been walking you have scarce caught more than a far-off vision of the magic water. As you made a turn in the road or climbed some little knoll on your way there came a sudden picture before you of a brilliant colour, neither blue nor green nor purple, such as you ever saw it before, framed in the stately branches of the dark pines. And the sky is pale, and yet the sky, too, seems pregnant with colour, and fathomless, and so the sea and the sky meet in one. Then you dive down into a little dale again and into a lonely glen, and the sea is away and the memory of it, only still mysteriously its influence seems to be around. The village of Porto Fino lies to your left, but far below upon the sea-shore. You must descend. The pines still fringe the ridge of land, where it overhangs the water, but now the vegetation will change. Little tufts and sprigs of divers shrubs cling to the rock—myrtle—and gracefully twining sarsaparilla ; but green things are not abundant here, where strange boulders of rock strike down into the sea, or lift up their great forms from its depths a little way from the shore ; and when the cape is rounded, and

the woods begin again, they are no longer pine plantations but sweeping chestnut groves that drape the hill-side. There is a little shrine that has been built upon the farthest point of the Porto Fino promontory. On windy days the 'Madonetta' has bidden fair to be cast from her home and hurled into the treacherous Mediterranean, for the gales rise up suddenly on this coast, and I have seen the smiling waters wax dark and livid in one short hour, dashing their waves in mighty billows upon the rocks, and tossing their white foam far aloft. Then the dolphins gather themselves in companies below the surface, and the ships are fain to take refuge in one of the bays which nature has provided along the coast. Of these Porto Fino is by far the best and largest for many miles ahead. The harbour can hold even large ships, and is a constant halting-place for the smaller craft which ply their trade along the coast. Then the little fishing-smacks are forced to be moored upon the beach, for the swell of the sea is heavy even in this sheltered bay.

So the footpath will have brought you down, curling round the cliff's front till you come where the chestnut woods are growing luxuriantly above the shores of the little harbour. Porto Fino's church is to the right of the village, and above it. It is on the neck of the peninsula, just where the land is narrowest, so that standing beside

it some windy day you can feel, on the one hand, from the turbid billows beneath, the foam that dashes up against the rocks, and on the other you can see the gentle heaving of the calmer waters in the little bay at your left. You must needs pass the church as you make your way down to the village. The way is steep, but it is paved, though the round stones are somewhat hard and slippery. Porto Fino is a small place. There is a piazza upon the shore whence the little pier juts out into the water, and around which the houses are built in a square. They are poor dwellings most of them, though one or two pink and yellow houses, with balconies, suppose themselves to be charming summer residences for strangers. The village is a fishing village, and therefore is pretty well huddled together upon the shore; but there are a few cosier looking cottages in the woods behind, where the lace-makers live; and the odds and ends of the place have crept up into the valley or upon the slopes. There are pleasure boats at Porto Fino, besides the fishing-smacks: though when I say pleasure boats I have not in mind those dainty little craft which are wont so to be called in fashionable watering-places, for these are rough and dingy, and built, I doubt not, against all rules of modern invention. Nevertheless, they are safe and comfortable, and swift enough when pulled by two stalwart fishers. They will beset you as you

come out upon the piazza, these swarthy boatmen, and clamour loudly for your favour. Then the boat will row you over the dark green waters of the little bay out into the wide sea without, where the water is bluer and less transparent ; and when you have rounded the promontory and skirted other little bays you will be back at Santa Margherita.

## The Lace Weaver.

ON the hill with crest that is fringed with stone pines, above Santa Margherita's town and harbour, Lucrezia's grey cottage stands, with thatched roof, among the trees. Olives are around her dwelling, for it stands on the nether slopes, where the fir's fragrance from above scarce reaches ; their fine branches and crooked stems rest traced upon the sky, and into their grey tones fig-trees bring brighter green for contrast, though brightest of all are the vines that twine beneath. The blue-grey smoke curls above the green-grey trees, to show where the lace-weaver lives ; a rough spring flows freshly out of the earth beside her cottage, with wooden trough to guide its stream into the brick basin, and thence into the beans and potatoes of her garden ; a rude balcony flanks the house, a walnut tree shadows it over, a *pergola* dims the light at the kitchen window ; and the gourd-plants trail beneath it on the ground, with ample golden flowers ; carnations, side by side with kitchen herbs, grow in a box upon the window-sill.

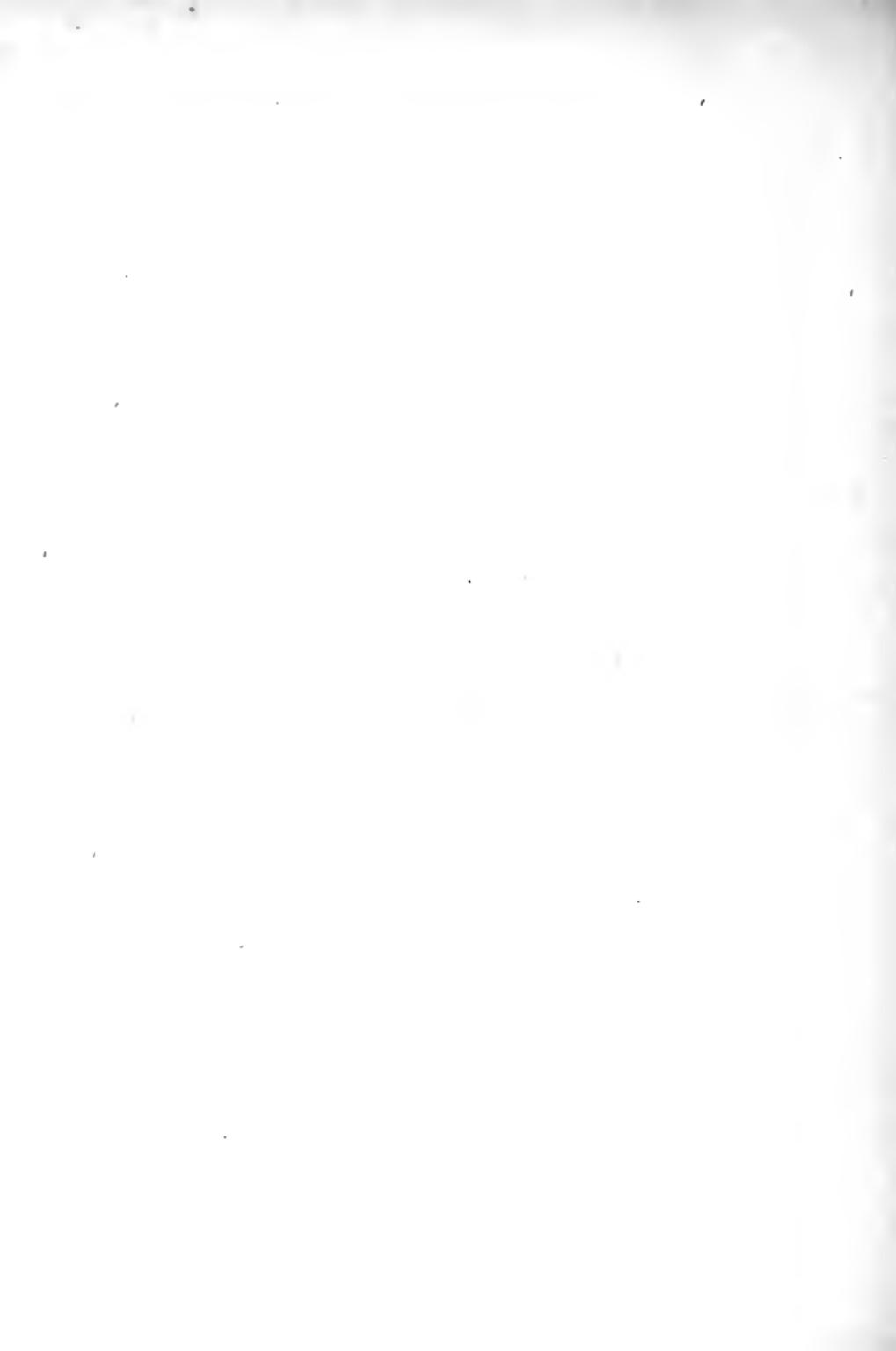
Lucrezia sits outside on the little terrace ; the pear

tree is white with blossom, just opposite, and at the foot of many a sloping, stone-hemmed garden, where green wheat waves and gladioli bloom between, the sunny sea spreads far away and breaks white upon the rocks ; but her face is not raised to look, for before her is the lace-pillow, and, while her fingers ply busily, her head is bowed, and she softly rocks a cradle with her foot. Lucrezia is a young mother. Last year, when the fruit was at the best and the fishing had been good, she was married to Pietro of Santa Margherita, and the little swaddled infant that sleeps at her feet is the first-born, who came with the summer's return this May-time. He has no features to boast of yet, and his legs and arms are tightly bound with swathing bands, but Lucrezia thinks him truly fair nevertheless, nor minds the piteous wail with which he will shortly break in upon her deftest bit of labour. She is a comely woman, but beautiful rather with the recollection of other beauty—the beauty of past generations—than perfect in her own person. She is dark and tall and straight, with square, broad shoulders and ample bosom ; her hair is almost black, her eyes are grey, her skin is bronzed and slightly freckled, her mouth is wide, and the teeth within it white and even ; the hands that weave and twist amid a labyrinth of threads are coarse and large, though seemly shaped ; the foot upon the cradle's



*The Lace Weaver.*

While her fingers ply busily, her head is bowed, and she softly rocks a cradle with her foot.



edge is no dainty foot, for it has grown hard upon the hard stones, and tanned with the sun, and soiled with the world's work of every day. Neither *contadine* nor fisherwives waste their scant pence on shoes and stockings.

Lucrezia plaits her white threads swiftly—so swiftly that you might almost see the pattern growing beneath her fingers, though it is no simple design that she weaves thus from memory, but an elaborate arrangement of groundwork and spray and border, that go to make the width most used for flounces. The wooden bobbins clap together merrily when Lucrezia thus nimbly twists and crosses threads over the pink pillow's surface. She is crooning a lullaby to the bandaged *bamboccio* the while, and nearly mars the use of it by the loud peals of laughter that Maria's conversation provokes, who sits idling on the cottage door-step.

'Marry? I wouldn't marry for worlds, and have to work as you're working now,' declares decisively that one who is yet a spinster. 'What man is worth it? For me, I like to amuse myself—in the way one should, of course! *Santa Vergine!* you're always at it! If you're not at the lace-pillow, you're with the fish to market or down in the villa round the *tomate* and the herbage! And then that marmot of yours! It's one thing to dandle him a bit for you when you're up to

Santa Margherita on an errand, but to have a thing like that of one's own——! Not for me!' 'Go to!' laughs Lucrezia. 'And that young man of Camogli that I know of?' 'And that young man—and that young man! What young man, and what's he to do with me?' simpers the maid. 'All very fine,' replies the married woman, with a giggle so loud that Ernesto gives an ominous whine, and would probably move his limbs were they not so well secured, 'that will *he* know better than I for a surety!' And she rocks the cradle faster, and begins to croon afresh, till the pins on the pillow want shifting forwards, and Maria so far recovers her gravity as to continue, 'You are always up to your jokes, you! But tell me a little—wilt teach me the lace-making if I have the patience to learn? It's the only way for us poor girls to earn a pair of ear-rings, I suppose.' 'Dear heart, you would never have patience,' says Lucrezia. 'A fisher-girl like you! Why, your hands are rough from the oar, and you'd never sit still a little half-hour. It's bad enough for me, who have been used to it since I was twelve years old!'

A portion of the pattern gets finished off at this point, and Lucrezia casts a handful of threads aside—the threads that have twined one kind of west for sprays—and takes up a new set to fill in the ground with. She has had a good day's work, has been at the pillow

at least five or six hours, and has completed nearly *mezzo palmo* of flounce, which is about five inches. If she were not the nimblest worker in all Santa Margherita's vicinity, she could never make as much lace as this in the whole twelve hours, and yet the Genoa shops will scarcely pay her more than a franc for the piece she has done, weaving since daybreak, till now that it is time to cook the *cena*. Indeed, if hers were not the best and smoothest made lace to be had along that shore, Lucrezia would not even earn as much. It is not without some reason that to Maria's remark about its being the best means of gain for a woman, she answers, but curtly, 'You believe it? Listen to me rather; that you, who have hard hands and slow wits, and the patience only of a spirit in purgatory, you would not make half a franc with your day at the pillow! Even the glove-sewing would suit you better, though 'tis but a poor trade! Take to yourself that young man of Camogli, and go in peace! He has a house above his head, and you are fit for nothing so well as to sell his fish for him at Santa Margherita, and harvest his wheat and his olives.'

Lucrezia rises to stretch her arms, for the shadows are creeping longer and a filmier light dims the sun's dazzle on the bay. It will be time to pare the potatoes and wash the rice for *minestra*, though, on second thoughts, she has a mind to cook some *polenta*—that

is quicker done, and just as acceptable for a second meal. Maria's gossip must end for this time. She, too, has a *cena* to make ready at home for the men, and Lucrezia has enough to do now, for, just when the pot wants putting on—that bundle in the cradle begins to wail, of course! ‘It’s always so,’ laments she plaintively, but the mother’s heart cannot find it within to be cross, though she must rake the fire with one hand while holding the infant to her breast with the other.

The first-born’s woes are stilled, supper simmers over the burning logs, in the light of whose flames Lucrezia’s copper vessels shine brightly on the smoke-tarnished walls; without, the sunlight has faded, and grey clouds cross the west. ‘We shall have a storm to-night,’ muses she on the terrace, looking seawards with her back to the road, and to the chestnut-woods behind her olive trees. Truly, the blue waves are sadder-coloured than before and begin to wear white feathers on their bosoms. A wind moves in the grey branches overhead, and rustles more noisily amid the broader-leaved chestnuts behind; on the hill’s crest it is sighing beneath the stone pines. ‘Pietro will surely not go to the fishing this night,’ says she, half aloud; and she turns to fetch the copper cauldron to fill at the spring.

Some one is coming through the chestnut wood that lies away from the sea—a lady. Is it one of the ladies

from the *palazzo* on Santa Margherita's beach? Yes—good Virgin—it is indeed, and the same one who bought lace of her last week! What a good fortune, for a private customer buys at double the price offered at Genoa shops. ‘Your servant,’ says she modestly, but without a curtsey—that is not the way with our *contadine*; yet her manner is none the less respectful. ‘A fair evening to you, my good girl,’ replies the town dame in the high singsong that is special to Genoese dialect, and different from the Venetian twitter or the deep Milanese chest notes. She is not alone—a tall man attends her, dressed after a supposed English mode, as for the country; he is chestnut-haired, and would call himself *biondo*, or fair, spite of his skin’s colour; that is why he affects the English style, and he too says a gracious ‘*Felice sera*’ to our Lucrezia, because she is a comely woman. She meanwhile, standing beside the fountain with her hand resting on the copper bowl to steady it, gazes with appreciating eyes on the lady’s elegant attire, who says presently to the swain beside her, ‘It will rain, I think—it behoves to go quickly home;’ then to the *contadina* whose vessel has filled the while at the trickling spring, ‘Have you any more lace of that sort that I bought last time?’ ‘Come up the steps beneath the *pergola*, dear lady, and I will show you what I have,’ replies Lucrezia, frankly, but with

no curtness as the words might imply. And she heaves the water-vessel to her head, which must first be replaced in the kitchen, whence she then brings two nicely dusted rush chairs for the *signori*. *La marchesa* sits down, asks a question about the prospects of grape and olive harvest, speaks a word to the now wakeful *bambino*, and handles black and white lace while the fair-haired gallant leans against the stone parapet and smokes and gives valuable opinions on stitch and pattern and quality.

Lucrezia has a handsome store of completed lace—of course, some of it is promised to the shop, but what matter? No one can quicker invent a suitable lie for the shopwoman, should the *marchesa* take a fancy to any special piece. There are lengths of all widths, in flounce, and edge, and insertion-lace; there are scarves and shawls, and parasol covers, and every kind of female adornment that is in fashion, whether suited to this special kind of *guipure* trimming or no. Lucrezia's lace is the finest made in the neighbourhood, but even hers is no fine and precious kind. True, in olden times the Riviera girls used to make a straight-edged and thin-threaded lace that was worthier the name, but, for this long time past, florid designs and Maltese stitches have come into vogue, and now we have nothing but *guipure* made along the shores. *La marchesa* buys her five metres

of heavy-weighted black silk flouncing, in which kind the loose-woven patterns show to best advantage, and when she has bargained a while over it, and laughed and talked friendly with Lucrezia, it is discovered suddenly by all three that the rising blast has lashed our blue sea's waters into swelling and breaking billows, and that the storm is overhead. Dark clouds hasten across the sunset, and the rain begins to drop. '*Misericordia!*' says the lady. For the square pink palace looks a long way off. She is fain to take the shelter of the lace-weaver's shady kitchen, that is now gracefully offered, and to blacken her dainty slippers on the square brick hearth and listen to the first-born's wail till the rain have ceased to water the garden, and the wind to turn up the olive leaves' white linings, till the worst of the storm be over, in fact, though waves still dash white spray on black and cloven rocks in the bay, and the sunlight be blotted out for good this day. But Pietro has good news on his return to the cottage ; the fishing has been good this broken weather, and Lucrezia has good news, too—she has sold five *metri* at an honest price to the *marchesa* of the great palace.

## **Il Manente.**

### **The Husbandman.**

AT Camogli, where the stone-pines adorn the cliff's edge, and burthen even the fresh sea-breeze with their strange and heavy sweetness—at Camogli, that is built beside the waves, and that has the quaint harbour where fishers dwell, there are many new houses for gentlefolk to live in, and one or two old ones for old families to whom they belong; and these well-worn palaces stand on their own lands, beside their own fig-trees, and beneath pines of their own planting. Such things are at Camogli, and even at Recco, though Recco is a little town with church and streets, not so picturesque by half as the thriving fishing village—such city memories are at both these places because they lie beside the sea, and because from homes and lodgings in their midst people can easily spend the half of their summer days in the water.

But at Ruta there are not many fine houses for city folk, and not even many old palaces, for Ruta is up on the hill with the land-breezes behind it, that come through clefts and valleys, and the sea-scent in front of

it that must travel across vineyards and up corn-covered terraces to get there. Yet there is a broad, smooth, carriage-road from Recco to the village on the hill—that same old road along which many a traveller of many a nation has come in the days when the railroad was yet unmade, of which many another has heard tell because of its beauty ; for Ruta stands on the way that used to be the highway from Genoa to La Spezia. And besides this wide and dusty one, there is another path by which you may reach the village that I mean—a path that strikes off from Camogli's gayest front, to wind steeply up the hill when once it has left Camogli's church behind ; a rough foot-path, whose sides are hemmed with low stone walls, and upon which other loose stones roll perilously. It is the way that the *manenti* take when they come in the sunrise hours to Camogli with their market goods, and carry fish up again that has been bought on the shore with their morning's earnings, for Ruta lies crowning the valley that is called in Genoa and on the Riviera the valley of fruit ; and, though nobles of old did not build their palaces so far from the sea, any more than town-folk of to-day, all of them are glad enough of the fruit that grows better where the shade is, and where dry sea-breezes are not so prone to wither.

Giovanni's villa lies on the western side of the hill, and looks to the sunrise. He is an old man, his hair is

whitening fast and his hands are wrinkled and horny, his face is seamed ; though so tall and strong a frame scarce will have need to stoop yet a while. But for all he has been on the ground, pruning the vines and the fruit-trees, and tilling the soil these many years, Giovanni has rarely yet had occasion to grumble much at his land's produce, though neighbours do tell him oftentimes the place lies with an unprofitable aspect. The terraced fields and little plantations where he grows the maize and peas and fine asparagus in season, lie one above another in patches, on the steep, with the rising ground behind to shield them from untoward winds, and the sun full to their front ; and beyond, where the hill curves round to westward, his cherry trees and pear and plum trees grow, with peach and almond trees between for a good sprinkling, and aloes faintly grey and stiff on the rocky wall above ; silver-lined olive-leaves wave from knotted boughs where wheat grows, with gladiolas blooming in its midst ; fig trees spread widely, and vines twine around wildly wherever there is room amongst all the cultivation : truly, Giovanni has no need to complain.

The old *manente* lives lonely ; he has few friends so close as the crops and the fruit-gathering that he labours so fondly for. The tender-leaved lettuce and early asparagus are more to him than neighbours, and the ripening of the red tomatoes is of keener interest than

anything that happens in the village, for the weather-worn man has none at home to care for him : his wife is dead, and, of his children, the sons are about the world, fishing at sea, and selling *pasta* in Genoa ; the daughters are well married in distant towns and villages. It is better so ; and to heave the pickaxe in the upturned field, to train the vines while thinking on Marrina's last-born babe or on Pietro's success a-board the merchant vessel, is dearer to the husbandman's heart than the sound even of loved voices around his hearth.

The day is a July day ; the wheat is waving yellow and near to the harvesting ; the melons have ripened well, and it is a good year for all the fruit ; the peaches have even been so many that *manenti* have given them away in baskets-full. Fine and tender spring crops have had their day, and it is over. This is the full time when nature is the most lavish—not a time of sharpest interest, perhaps, but the husbandman joys in his reward. It will be a good vintage, and the green autumn figs crowd thick on their trees' branches ; they are swelling fast, and will streak their soft green skins ere long with pink, as they come to full maturity. People say there will be a falling-off in the chestnut-harvest on the other hand, but that matters less to this *manente* of whom I write, because his riches are greater in olive-woods.

Giovanni has been to Camogli this early morning already, and he is an old man, but he means to go to Rappallo in the forenoon yet. ‘Fair Madonna, and it is the old ones must work whether they will or no,’ says he to neighbours who greet him on the steep and stony way, with some comment on his toil; ‘the young have all gone to the devil, and to the city trades; what would the soil do if it weren’t for us, whose bones are oiled to the labour?’ But though he fret and fume a bit now and then, if truth were told, Giovanni would ill brook even a day’s idleness! What if the path be bad, and the burthen on an old man’s shoulder makes the sweat to steal down his brow? Do not the fig-leaves cast broad shadows where one sits awhile on the flints by the roadside to rest, and is it not consolation enough to note how the fruit waxes full, and how the olives are rich in berries? Besides even at three hours after dawn, when Giovanni was climbing the hill again from market, dews were still moist and breezes fresh off the sea from behind; it is of a hot sultry night, or with a fierce midday sun overhead, that one fears the mount a bit, and wearies of the secret stillness amid trees, or of the silver dazzle on that blue sheet of Mediterranean that one leaves behind and below. No one can say that in Ruta there is a hardier labourer than the *manente* who rents the larger portion of his villa from

those silk-mercers of Genoa—owners of the white house on the ridge. It is sale-time and profit-time now; and though Giovanni may silently love the season best that is for tilling and sowing and reaping, it is not he who will shrink from any day's work. Just an' hour to eat the breakfast that a little neighbour's wench will have prepared him, who comes in from hard-by to do such jobs at a modest price, just another little half-hour to go the dearly-loved round of his property and pluck more fruit and herbs for the new market, just a grim jest or two with the children of the *signori* from the house, who frolic around and get many a handful of garden spoil—then Giovanni is away again, for Rappallo is a bit of way off, and one must be there not too late at the *stabilimento*, or others will have gotten the custom.

The sun glitters on the pale sea that is down and away a mile or more, beyond the sloping fields and gardens, and the dipping valley. Giovanni's villa is above that part of Ruta's village lying along the roadside, above the church too, and close upon the bend of a path that turns away from the sea into turf and chestnut woods; nevertheless, he keeps a hold on the great white water still, and can look over the valley that is rich of careful cultivation, can see churches standing cypress-guarded, and palaces where the land drops shore-

ward—can see as much, and even more, of the sea-view than they can from the top windows of the old tavern in the village, where carriage-folk used to stop when carriages were many along the highway, and Ruta was a place for the horses to bait at and *vetturini* to feed at, while their *signori* got dinner on the terrace beneath the vines. For all he never remembers thinking of it, Giovanni would not like to have his back to the sea, not though it dazzle old eyes, even from far, as it dazzles them to-day, for no clouds have come up to make walking lighter beneath a burthen by the time Giovanni shoulders his fruit-baskets anew and comes down the steps upon the high road. The church bells ring a chime as he passes, and Maria, the *pedona* who sells eggs, comes down the paved way behind to go to Rappallo as well. She is a woman of years, and fit to join company with Giovanni, to whom her tongue can wag none the less fast for his economy of response. The old *manente* is a heavy-jawed and tough-hided specimen of *contadino*; one can see at a glance his words will be few, but Maria's chatter flows not the less merrily because his deep-set eyes show no sign, and the wrinkles that strew his ancient face do not let themselves be displaced into smiles. Maria is an old woman in whose yellow cheeks the lines seem to have no rhythm, so purposeless is she; but every seam on the old husbandman's countenance

is as though set there by careful length of living. Striking into the tunnel that, just outside of Ruta's village, covers the roadway, Maria turns to hurl a neighbourly jest after the girl whom they have met driving a donkey from some distant market. A sapphire-coloured morsel of sea lies behind a frail-foliaged aspen tree—lies framed in the green of shrubs that grow around the grotto's mouth; a long, broken water-line hems the land that fondly goes out in crags and points to meet it, and puts forward her fairest vegetation to fringe the border; in the farthest distance the sea seems to creep into wider bays, and the cliffs to grow less, and the water margin straighter, till a mist gathers into shape, and holds dim white roofs and tall spires and domes within its folds where Genoa lies away to westward. Giovanni, standing with head bent beneath a burthen, Maria, with shrunken face and forehead bound about with crimson kerchief, have this and more before them as they linger a space out of the sunlight, but neither notes skies and seas so familiar, for Rappallo is yet a long way off. ‘The *parroco* of San Martino has got to manage now without that serving-woman of his that he thought so much of,’ says Maria, as they step out into the cooler shadow on the grotto's other side. ‘Did you know it? The foolish thing is going to marry! No husband will be what *that*

old master was to her. Yes—yes, poor holy man!—the feasts coming on, too, and he who scarcely knows where to lay hand on his own canonicals unless she's by. And as for the sacred wafers, who, indeed, will see to them?' Giovanni's comment is but a suppressed murmur as he turns to look towards the priest of San Martino's Church, whose spire lies up against a chestnut-mantled hill to left. The green is the brighter green of inland foliage here, for even olives are scarcer to mingle their silver-grey tones ; hills lie behind and beside one another, and turf is fresh beneath these shadier woods, rills trickle and flowers grow ; the Mediterranean's memory is forgotten for a while, and the hot, grey aloe plants and Indian figs give place to gorse bushes and mountain ash. Giovanni tramps forward steadily, and both man and woman have soon left the few tall houses of *negozianti* behind, that have been built on this side the archway by those who prefer land to sea breezes for change from town. And Maria beguiles the way with many a tale about these same *negozianti*, till, rounding a point in the smooth high road, Giovanni pauses to rest his burthen upon the wall just where the way turns to right again and, with mountains and chestnut-clad hills behind it still, looks forward once more upon the blue, sunny sheet of the sea. Figs, and aloes, and olives grow again by the roadside with vines between, and here



### *The Husbandman.*

And Maria beguiles the way with many a tale, till, rounding a point in the smooth high road, Giovanni pauses to rest his burden upon a wall.



the chestnut-woods flourish beside them as well, and dark cypress trees crown the long crests of hills to the front. So now, as the old people walk, the sea draws ever nearer again if a bend in the road hide it sometimes from view ; but the mountains are not left behind all the same, nor the chestnuts shorn for other culture, and, when they reach Rappallo, a river winds about it, and mountains guard it, in whose cleft the town lies ; greenest woods girdle it round, though its front be spread beside the waves, and the *stabilimento* be aptly enough placed for the bathing. Maria sells her new-laid eggs for the summer visitors, Giovanni has disposed of green herbs and melons enough ; but the one lingers to return with the sunset cool, and the other hastens back betimes to the village that is his home, and to the *villa* that reaps all his labours and his fondest affections.

## **La Donna di Casa.**

### **The Country Housekeeper.**

PORTOFINO'S bay lies calmly blue beneath a morning sky : the sun shines, and its glamour is set upon dainty ripples of restless sea, where the Mediterranean sways and washes without a quiet harbour. The Villa C—— stands to westward, with face set seaward toward Sestri's opposite shore, and terrace built inward over the bay. It was a fortified castle once upon a time, long ago, when battles were fought along the coast, and Genoa was a great maritime power ; the castle's battlements are there still, built down into the rock that lies sunk in the waves ; around their base aloes and sweet thyme cling to barren soil, and upon their crown a modern dwelling-house has grown into shape, with windows that see the water a hundred feet below, and a patch of terrace-garden growing upon scant mould, between the old walls of the fortifications. A goodly fig-tree finds room spite of scant space, and spreads wide boughs into the castle's very windows, with fresh big leaves upon them, and luscious fruit thick

between ; the gate is to the hinder side, looking inland, and, when you find its mouth in the hill-side among the olives, dank and rugged stone steps will lead you within the house, and through the house out again on to that terrace upon the battlements that is sea-framed.

Here lived Teresa years ago when the Villa C—— belonged to an old Genoese *marchese* of lone life and bachelor ways, and Teresa is the country house-keeper. Her master is her pride, her pet, and her slave ; she scorns the *negoziante* class who can grow rich in a trice, and buy a title, too, since the year 1848 ! She would tell lies, white or black, for an old family's honour ; day and night her simple soul schemes to uphold, amid poverty, the traditions of a race for whom she has lived alone these twenty years ; the coronet of the house of C—— is the fairest of all in her eyes, and there is no place, though ruined, like Portofino Castle and Portofino Bay.

And here Teresa is right. Leaning upon the fortification's old wall before the front windows—that wall that holds the terrace I have told of, looking around on this sun-lit summer morning that I call to mind, scarce anyone would grumble at Teresa's verdict. To westward Genoa is hid from sight because of many rocks and promontories that seek the waves, and are pine-fringed

and clad with olives ; towards the sun-rising a near point—the other of the harbour's arms, of which our Castle's pedestal is one—hides neighbouring clefts of the shore, but further on a space, the bays seem to sweep inland with larger curves, and from the point of Portofino Cape many creeks, big and little, go together at last to make the one great gulf that curves round again to Chiavari and Sestri, lying opposite. The blue waves sway softly to and fro with the sun's glitter on their bosoms ; the sky is pale and calm in the heat ; white sails and yellow mark the horizon and link sea and sky in the nearer foreground ; round shapes of hills along the coast lie languidly to right and left, for the coming heat has sent a white mist before it. This is all looking seaward ; from beneath the fig-tree or from off the hindermost wall of battlement you might see that gentle slopes or steeps are around, to girdle the bay—that vineyards and rich cultivations adorn them, that olive and fruit trees shade their sides, that green turf springs near the water, and aloes and house-leeks upon the rocks. And Portofino's tiny town lies around the head of Portofino's harbour ; this, also you can see from off the battlements of Villa C——, can even hear the sound of children's voices from off the stone-paved piazza—fisher-children, who play around the beach and the little pier—or the

harsher tones of women calling and men in argument. Where the land heaves inward and the slopes climb up into hills, chestnut trees grow in place of olives and aloes, and the turf is more mossy beneath them, for streams flow there, on whose brink ferns and the maidenhair flourish. Looking across the tranquil blue bay, to the hill and cliff over against us, other villas stand up on the green background—where other old families live or have lived with other country housekeepers. And of these our Teresa is strangest and best of all. Watch her now, with Maso the fisher, as she stands in the shadow of the Castle wall, with face set towards that inland aspect that is green with luxuriant vegetation. No silk gown, white apron and sober cap are here the badges of responsible service. Though Teresa's power be absolute and her position in the household invulnerable, she has rough work to do and wears no stockings to her feet, while her gown is but of homespun linen, her plaited, grey locks are uncovered, and no collar shields a throat that is open to the sun within an amber kerchief. But it is in her strange, strong face that she wears all the dignity of her office. Seamed though it be with gathering years and the labour of life, individuality is set in its every wrinkle, and power in the massive chin, swelling nostrils and heavy brow, while in the keen, black eyes youth's fire is not yet quenched. Maso is afraid as he

stands, leaning with curly, dark head against a cherry tree, for ‘ And you think you can pass off your nasty tunny fish on me,’ screams the tall, old woman ! ‘ And you would like to get *soldi* from the *marchese* for what you can’t sell elsewhere, I don’t doubt ! Go to, ill-educated man that you are ! Sardines for the master’s dinner I will have, if you fish for them even at this hour !’ And Teresa’s palms are poised defiantly on her broad hips, her tall and powerful frame sways with agitation. Maso laughs, but his laughter is timorous, and quickly he turns to run lightly down the hill with the scorned contents of his basket. ‘ Yes, yes ; you may well run, for back again you need to be in a quarter of an hour, mind you !’ calls the housekeeper in his wake. ‘ It is a little fast day, and the *marchese* eats *magro*, and requires the fish ! Truly it seems impossible,’ continues she, using this favourite ejaculation as she comes slowly up again, and round the outer battlements to the brick-paved kitchen ! Its deep-set windows look down the castle wall, and down the steep rock into the sea ; the sunlight streams through them to flicker the rough floor over, and noting this, that tells the time of day, ‘ Up, and quick, you lazy wench !’ calls Teresa sharply to the gaunt help-woman who slaves at her orders. ‘ The *Signor padrone* will be home presently, and no breakfast cooked, and that linen yet to wring out !

Come, lend me a hand!' So the shirts of the marquis being hung out to dry on the castle turret, in company with sundry sheets and aprons, the crumpled-featured woman falls to fanning the charcoal fire with a feather screen, whilst Teresa chops fine herbs for the master's daily omelette. 'Here he is now,' mutters she half crossly, as a heavy footfall climbs the stone stair, and, bustling into the forecourt that is open to the terrace by an archway, she begins to set out two-pronged forks and blunt knives on a coarse linen tablecloth for the meal. The *marchese* always eats in this middle court, whence he can see his pots of carnation and sweet geranium-leaf on the terrace, and get a glimpse of the sea behind the leaves of the fig-tree across the arch; but the house-keeper oftentimes scolds at him for not using the *salotto* in preference, which is dark and dimly furnished; here, in the hall, the coarse oaken table and carved oak press stand alone with a few rush-seated chairs on the brick floor, and are nowise adequate, in Teresa's eyes, to her master's high lineage. He comes slowly, he is a man of somewhat sad countenance—dark, and pale, and fat. He wears a limp, long frock-coat now, but soon changes it for a many-coloured dressing-gown, while keeping the flower-worked smoking-cap still that Nina, his pretty niece, made for him last New Year. 'I have fairly hunger,' says he somewhat glumly to the old

woman, glancing at the scarce-spread table. ‘So much the better,’ replies this one; ‘*vossignoria* will eat with the keener appetite!’ ‘It is near to eleven,’ murmurs he again, but would not venture closer than this towards a reproof to the all-powerful *donna di casa*. Teresa condescends to no reply; but, when she has placed the white-wine flask beside plate and knife and fork, and has



THE MARQUIS AND HIS HOUSEKEEPER.

retired into the kitchen to put the omelette on the fire, some sense of justice, perhaps, compels her to deal sharp words again to the drudge, and this is the only effect of the *padrone’s* mild displeasure! But the omelette is good, and the *funghi* are better than yesterday’s, so when the *marchese* has eaten a mouthful he is content to obey Teresa’s summons on the terrace that he may see

a white-sailed schooner pass across the offing well in sight. ‘There will be ugly weather to-night,’ remarks the woman. ‘No, I think not,’ replies he, thinking of an unfinished tumbler of Monferrato. ‘*Vossignoria* is not always right, however! It is not the fishers who will make so sure of fine weather because the sun shines in heaven and the sea is blue! Wait and see if they moor not their boats high on the beach before evening!’ ‘May be,’ says the *marchese* mildly, and returns to his breakfast, while Teresa, approaching that other turret over the harbour, sends a cry out of good lungs to the fisherman coiling ropes in a boat below. It is Maso, who has not sent the fish. His answer comes travelling up through the olive trees, betwixt and above whose boughs the jewel-blue water lies cool in the heat, and deeper-coloured where a rim of midday shadow is around each brown old boat. ‘We have taken a “sea-serpent!”’ calls Maso again, and Teresa hastens within with this piece of news, for the capture of these dog-fish is an event, even if the sight of a shark or a monster cuttle-fish be a matter of yet more thrilling interest because of rarer occurrence. ‘What will *Vossignoria* take for dinner?’ asks the housekeeper when the tale has been told. And after a moment’s pause for the reply that well she knows the *marchese* dares not give, ‘You have a miserable portion of sardines,’ continues the

autocrat, having been through this daily mockery of humility, ‘the half of a boiled fowl—which well the priests allow on a half-fast day, having but the health you have—two potatoes, and a filled tomato with a fry to finish.’ ‘*Benissimo!*’ says the *marchese*, as he has said every day these twelve years, and then he knows he has ordered his dinner.

It is evening and—in the boat that has lain gently swaying in the harbour all day, beneath a pink awning—the *marchese* takes his nightly row. The dolphins, whence Portofino has its name, sport around the prow, but soon they gather in companies, and sink safely low beneath the sea’s surface, for Teresa was right after all, and there is a storm brewing behind the sunset. The *marchese* comes within doors with the clothes that hung a-drying, for the rain-drops begin to fall. The boats are moored high, the waves gather white crests over the darkening blue. Even in Portofino’s land-locked harbour that is the safest on all the coast, the waters that were as smooth as glass begin to swell a little with the rush of the sea from without ; they are blue still from far, and green from off a boat’s prow, but they are duller beneath the grouping clouds than they were in the searching sunlight. Teresa does not mind, for did she not prophesy that bad weather was blowing up ?

## Bathing Time.

THE blue Mediterranean with warm and buoyant waters laps and breaks around Italy's peninsula, and Italy's people are none the less fond of their fair and treacherous sea than we of our greyer and more boisterous Atlantic, even though theirs leaves them no passage northward into other lands, nor binds them about with her waves. Long ago, even so long ago as in the time of the first great Romans of the Republic, Italians loved the shores of their land, and would flock thither from the middle countries to breathe the stronger, if not always fresher, sea-breeze, and to rest and revel in the clear waters of ebbing waves. Many fashions have changed since then, but that one still holds good. From inland towns people fly to the smooth beach, or the rocky, of their sea's landmark when hot August days are heavy; scarce a family even of the hindermost nobility—and in Italy, as is well known, this nobility is only the country's gentry—but has some kind of dwelling, good or bad, upon some portion of the shore. Even seaport town people seek the mountains less

readily than some village on the coast which they have seen all their lives, for, though briny breezes from off these inland waters can never be invigorating as those that travel across the Atlantic, Italians have none the less fond a belief both in them and in the soft waves wherein they delight to plunge. And of all the sea-loving people of the south the people of Genoa are best at the sport. Crowds seek the Lido at Venice, bathing-houses are built into the waves, music plays and fine water-costumes are there displayed. The rich and pleasure-loving of all nations ply this summer pastime busily at Nice, but none of them know the sea as do they of the quieter Riviera haunts ; none of them can leap from sharp rocks to cut the green surface, none can dive and swim, and brave risks of dolphin and cuttle-fish, sometimes even of sharks, as can the dwellers on the rocky coast where no smooth sands help the timid ones.

All along the coast on Genoa's either side habitations crowd the earth ; palaces, time-worn and soiled or new and gaudy, for the rich ; tall and thin and straight houses with small rooms and many storeys for the class of the *negozianti* and *artisti* ; everybody must do the 'Season of the Baths' somehow. Quarto, Quinto, Nervi, Bogliasco, not to speak of Albaro nearer town, and then Sori, Recco, and best of all, Camogli, where the stone pines grow in a fringe along the hill's ridge—every-

where there are houses in flats, with apartments to let ; everywhere cottages stand beside palaces or behind *stabilimenti*, so that all classes should have room equally. The proprietors of villa Franchi, villa Crosa, villa Groppallo, and many more, come in elegant summer attire or in economical costumes, to recruit '*in villeggiatura*' and to bathe and dive and swim in waters that lap the beach of their own domains. *La signora Friuli*, who has many children, and whose husband is in the *Pasta* trade, comes from the fifth storey of a house in the narrow town street to wear out her own old clothes and to send the children shoeless on to the beach of Camogli, whence one and all dip in the mild blue sea. A terraced hill rises behind Camogli's picturesque harbour, with its fisher-huts ; the hill is cultivated with wheat patches and little potato fields, for it belongs to the old palace that stands below, whose walls, once fresco-painted, are now so weather-stained. But the cultivation is of a desultory nature, and the olives are its best harvest, of which the small, sturdy trees stand over the terraces with gnarled trunks and twisted branches. Following the path that leads up to the flat of a ridge, you can reach pine-plantations, where dark and widely-spreading trees stand in the soft earth on the cliffs' edge and on the side also where inland scenery comes in sight, with church-steeples and houses dotted

over a valley's expanse. The faint, heavy perfume of tropical vegetation hangs around, pine-dust lies thick and slippery on the ground, paths wind about, laurel bushes grow beside them, and, though the western slope look towards mountains, the hill's crest rests over against the sea again. Waves lap far below, where cloven rocks and smooth rocks and peaked rocks are sunk in the sand for ramparts ; waves swell gently for miles in front, more waves of clouds seem to be in the sky, and fishing smacks sway on the sea's surface ; brown sails and white sails lie against the cloud's background, and the broken coast-line winds back to where Genoa halts, like a fancy city, between mist and sunshine. This is Camogli, where many a man and woman and lad and lass and child has rejoiced in the *stagione dei Bagni*. And yet Camogli is not the fashionable one among Riviera bathing-places, and we must turn to the sun-setting side of the Riviera capital for a glimpse of the life that is August life indeed to the professional pleasure-hunter.

A railway has been open for some time now along the eastern Riviera : it has marred the perfection of some fair spots, but it has its conveniences, and it cannot spoil far afield. But in the days that I best remember there was no railroad to eastward, and the *Ponente* shore had thus an advantage over the other in civilization's eyes. There was a *strada ferrata* to Nice some time

ago, a *strada ferrata* that some people wondered was ever made : the *vetturini*, whose trade is marred for instance, and the diligence proprietors, who can no longer count on crowding their vehicles with dust-smothered passengers, or the traveller, who has money to pay for a post-chaise, and can spare time to loiter along the road at his pleasure, enjoying the full fragrance of its loveliness, and providing food for extortion to the innkeepers. The trains never run regularly—some part of the road is always out of repair—you travel in fear of being plunged into the sea, and the carriage route is altogether spoilt. Yet it is a step in civilization. ‘What would you have?’ says the ever obsequious guard to whom one confides one’s wrongs at having been five hours longer on the road than the guide-book stated. ‘Did we go faster, you would be now in the sea : the road is not safe. Patience !’ the invariable ejaculation of an Italian when others but himself are complaining.

To anyone who knows the Cornice from Genoa to Nice the name of Pegli will not be totally strange. It is, or rather used to be, a little fishing village ; used to be, for of late years there has been built in the midst of it a grand Stabilimento, whither the town’s inhabitants flock during the months of July and August for the sea-bathing. In summer it is a fashionable place ; many of Genoa’s nobles divide their summer between Pegli

and some inland foreign baths, whilst the *bourgeoise* class seek their holiday first in quiet mountainous parts of Italy known best to themselves, but do not fail to return for *i Bagni* when the rich have left things cheaper. In winter Pegli is utterly desolate, excepting for some few foreigners, mostly English, who try to make themselves comfortable in the huge marble halls of the Stabilimento, built only for coolness, in the delusion that they are safer from bronchitis because they see the sun and know it is Italy, than they would be, snug and warm, in English homes.

Pegli stands straggling along the beach of a sunny bay, almost within the Gulf of Genoa. The village itself is not pretty, but around it on the sea shore, with gardens sloping down into the very waves, and stone loggias and terraces whose feet stand in the water, above it on the hill-side, girt about with woods and vineyards, stand many a grand old palace or cool and pleasant villa. True, there are here, as everywhere else, in Northern Italy, queer examples of modern Italian architecture, in thin, tall houses, painted over with every crude tint of scarlet, orange, blue, and violet, bearing staring frescoes of horses and water-nymphs, and balconies out of perspective. But these defective edifices, though many in number, cannot utterly spoil the place. Though dusty the highway and breathless

the summer days, the idle, hazy hours are happy that one may spend in the villas or bathing-houses of Pegli. In the Stabilimento for ten francs a day you have (according to the maître d'hôtel) every luxury which human craving may desire. A cool, marble-floored, furnitureless room, with goblin-bedizened ceiling



FLIRTATION AT PEGLI.

and mosquito-curtained bed, an ample billiard room, an elegant 'salon,' a vast dining-room, every convenience for sea or freshwater bathing, even a ball-room, in which to flirt once a week with any one of the pale dark-eyed ladies who invite you to that pastime. Nor is the ball-room the only meet place for this exercise;

there is a balcony—two, nay three balconies—and a large marble terrace that you can pace in the cool night air, gently smoking your cigarette in company with an attractive Milanese, Piedmontese, or Tuscan countess. Rising in the morning at five, or even before, you stroll down lightly clad to the shore, where the little waves are washing lazily up and down on the shelving beach, cool and limpid in the dewy dawn ; you cross the soft small strip of shingle and parched, wrinkled sand—it is only a strip, for we have no tide—you secure one of those quaint little tents built out into the water and you adorn yourself for the great event of the day. Then issuing forth freely into the soothing water, you meet all the lovely ladies whom you saw last night at *table d'hôte*, in every variety of fascinating attire. Some are dressed as nymphs, some wear the most elaborately embroidered flannel garments, some have broad-brimmed Leghorn hats, but these are they who fear the spoiling of their complexions, and are few in number. Out of this mass of insinuating loveliness you choose the one to you most sympathetic, you ask her if she swims (but of course she swims, since she is Italian, or at worst Italian by education and customs), you engage her for the morning as you would for a dance, you conduct her out to sea and does she need any assistance you offer it. You talk, you laugh, the hour passes, and you bring her safely to shore.

You make your way back to your apartment, return to your couch and smoke. You read the paper, you drink coffee, then you dress, play billiards, and attempt breakfast. You yawn, doze, but not again see the fair water-nymph until dinner at five P.M., when she reappears in other guise, as the perfumed, powdered, languid, and *bien coiffée* lady of fashion. After dinner everyone saunters forth to the woods and gardens. Those who can, go in pairs, those who cannot in dreary solos or triplets. It is still hot, but not beyond endurance. The Pallavicini Gardens close by are wonderful ; waterworks are there, artificial lakes, grottos with stalactites, Chinese pagodas, Swiss châlets, and English farmhouses, besides arbours, into which the confiding stranger strolls innocently, to be drenched unawares from a secret stream, and whence he darts, less confidently, only to be met by four or five more conflicting streams on some deceptive bridge or turret. There are many more cunning devices besides, and beyond all—or rather not to be marred by them all—is the subtly seductive beauty of Southern nature : the luxuriant vegetation, the waveless dreamy sea, the tender rose-tinted sky, the trickle of many a tiny rivulet, the hot, pale air rich with harmonious scents of orange blossom, rose, and magnolia ; and then later on, when the hours have sped into darkness, the whisper of rising night-breezes amid the foliage, the flittering of fire-flies,

the shooting of stars, the hush of waves on the shelving shore below, when the water is gently moved by the touch of the wind. Night grows, everyone goes home. The terraces of hotels and palaces are peopled with gracefully-reclining ladies who smoke cigarettes and flirt fans, with obsequious and attentive cavaliers, flattering and self-conscious ; with fat dowagers, wearied and sleepy, who yet will not for the life of them retire to leave the field open to younger and fairer rivals. The cool hours wear away—the only hours in which one lives in summer—a short while of sleep, and the early morning is back again with its delicious water duties and the lazy hours that follow on till night.

**Part Two**

*In the Apennines*



## The Mountains.

WHERE the winding chain of the Apennines stretches upward from the sea, crossing and recrossing the land with so many and such strange devices that from off the height of one of the mountains themselves there seems scarce room for a space of level plain, wedged in between ridges or sunk in clefts of hills, are the fair valleys of North Italy. Away from the blue sea and its blinding beauty, and from the leaden heat of the shores, they hold a fresh and free life of their own. Heavy night dews there feed the wild flowers that sicken in the nerveless pallor of the summer sea-air, and fresh water runs swiftly from mountain springs. Sometimes they are narrow and hidden valleys, in whose depth even villages could scarce find a home, did they not climb the hill-sides on either hand, and camp out, as it were, upon the meadows or among the vineyards. Or, again, they are wider, so that little towns have been built within them—quaint towns with tall houses and taller *campanile*, at whose side there flows, perhaps, a shallow river, brown upon its shingly bed.

Where, north of Genoa and the sea some twenty miles, the low back of the Giove mountain lies across the country, there is one of these more open valleys that creeps upward toward the higher peak of Antola, and along its way many a picturesque little village has grown for years, wearing out the thatched roofs of its chimneyless houses beneath hot suns and sharp mountain winds, cheerily holding its own against storms and inundations from the river hard by, that is so cruel a foe when the great rains have been at work. Little hamlets cling to the mountain sides, with scarce a common thoroughfare beside them ; while other hamlets that stand upon the roadside can often boast a finer house in their midst, for the *forestieri* come in summer, and people whose houses lie conveniently can let rooms. By these villages a stone bridge is even built over the stream, so that the torrent may be safely crossed when it is swollen by the rains.

It was early on a summer evening that I first saw this broader and loveliest of North Apennine valleys which is between Giove's mountain and the more cloven peaks of Antola hills. In the towns it had been so hot of late that not all the delights of sea-bathing in soft, Mediterranean waters, from the marble steps of olive-planted gardens, nor even the seductiveness of the *dolce far niente* beside spouting fountains, beneath colonnades

and on balconies, could banish the longing for the freedom of a fresher air, could atone for the remorseless Scirocco, for the sapping heat of those white August days and terrible nights. I sought release from them all and from the mosquitoes, where green trees might perchance fan a breeze towards me, where turf would at least be cool to lie on, and I sought it in the valleys —so little known even by those who live within their reach—of the Piedmontese Apennines.

I had seen a little station, just at the mouth of the Giove tunnel on the way to Alessandria, around which the country seemed to me crisply and luxuriantly beautiful. It was called Busalla. No one knew of it as a recommendable *villettiatura*; Pontedecimo, Serravalle, Voltaggio were suggested to me instead, but I preferred my own choice. The little town is dirty, noisy, dusty as little Italian towns mostly are; but in the country round about I was not disappointed. Dense, bountiful chestnut woods, whose tender-coloured, fan-like leaves sway soothingly in the whispering breeze, would alone have been enough to freshen me, wearied by grand buildings and splendid colonnades. And besides the desired trees there was the gurgling of water all about—sometimes I could scarcely find from whence. I would glance around to see the stream that was babbling so audibly, and lay my head down again on the turf, fancying I was

mistaken, only to hear the mocking laughter of the water again when I had ceased to look for it.

When I arrived at Busalla, I was rather at a loss at first about a shelter for the night. The cleanest even of the two inns looked scarcely such as I cared to enter. I questioned a comely female in the piazza, who had figs and peaches in a basket on her head, and who was freely gesticulating and shouting at a handsome *negoziente* from Genoa. Having secured her attention by means of a larger remuneration than the nominal price she asked for the fruit, I learnt that there was a *magnifico stabilimento* at Savignone, a village some three miles off: I could have a conveyance, or she herself would show me the way, as she was going to the village. I accepted her offer—the *vettura* I had seen standing out, and I should have feared for my safety at its mercy.

We came first through the little town, with its butcher, fruiterer, and inevitable barber, past the old white-washed *campanile* with the sun-dial on its façade, and struck out upon a roughish way to the left. There was a torrent to cross on stepping-stones. I recollect that my guide laughed loudly at my care to keep on the stones. She trudged through the water on her bare feet. For a good half-hour the road runs alongside of just such a drowsy river as I have remembered before,

creeping away furtively in the midst of an arid bed, too weary in the drought even to lift its voice ; yet this river can swell beneath the sharp lash of an angry thunderstorm, to roll onward in muddy, turbulent volumes, regardless of walls, bridges, or any other obstacle. Now to the left is a weir : the road mounts some hundred feet above the level of the water, and is none of the safest to drive over, being narrow, ill-made, and unparapetted. I was glad I had not chosen the *vettura*.

Glad too, because a more lovely walk could scarcely be conceived. The valley lay before me in all its sweet, mellow beauty : fresh, crisp, luxuriant, and yet burnished all over and saturated with the dim, gently sorrowful shadow of coming autumn. The vintage was near, and the terraced hill-sides were hung with the rich festoons of unpruned vines, that seemed fondly to try and cover the bare ground whence the golden wheat had been shorn. Waving, sweeping chestnut woods drape those hills around, leaving bare only the summits, whose frail outlines lie clear against the pale sky. Unlike bolder types of mountains, these Apennines are fretted all over with a delicate tracery of faint furrows that wander waywardly, and of watercourses that rise slenderly above to grow into large ravines and gashes below. Nature is warm and gracious here, but not wanton with luxu-

riance, as in the more tropical beauty which I had just left ; the country is not a wild country because the hand of man has rested on it all to put cultivation within its valleys, and even upon its hill-sides ; but cultivation has



IN THE FIELDS AT SAVIGNONE.

not wiped away the mark of nature's own wayward grace, that is fit to that other grace, free, winning, and wayward, too, even to quaintness, which belongs to its people.

We crossed the bridge—the only stone bridge on the

river, that gives its name to a village hard by—and followed the way that steeply climbs the hill for a while until another Campanile is in sight. Ten minutes more of climbing brought us out on to the piazza of Savignone.

I dismissed my friendly peasant guide, who promised me her warmest prayers in exchange for my silver coin, and watching her as she reaped neighbourly greetings from knots of country folk gathered on the *piazza* for their evening relaxation, I looked around upon the village that was, for a while, to be my home. I stood in a large open square paved with round pebbles; a church was on my right—on either side of which, and forming a quadrangle round about, lay a long, low building, yellow-painted and large-windowed, formerly a hospital, but now the *magnifico stabilimento* of which I had been told. Here were evidently the remains of an old feudal borough, belonging probably in long-lost times to one of those lords of the marshes so famous in the days of the terrible *condottieri*. Even through the embellishments of modern stucco one could trace the skeleton of a palace which had seen better usage, in the days when architecture was something more than a name; and besides the palace, hospital, or *stabilimento*, there were ruins of a castle on a little hill close above, a hill that in the twilight seemed

to dwell beneath the shadow of another and rockier mountain.

All around me rose graceful and methodless mountains, with forms that were broken into a wealth of harmonies, and sky-line lying clear-cut and undulating upon the darkening blue. A soft dew fell from out the hot day upon all drooping things, and, as I rested, the sound of rippling water smote on my hearing—of water that, said I, would ripple and murmur just the same to-morrow, when the sun should be burning overhead. ‘Ah, yes, we have many streams here; that is why the doctors have built a *Stabilimento Idroterapico*,’ was the old *contadino’s* explanation, to whom I turned now for advice. ‘Your honour will be well there in the Stabilimento; there is true luxury! We have a fair spot at Savignone for anyone to pass the time in, and one does not feel the heat too much—no! And over the gorge of the river is *la Valle Calda*.’ So I stayed at Savignone; and when the sun’s power had flagged the next day, and dews crept down once more, I went back upon my steps of the first evening—back almost as far as Busalla, that I might learn to know that other gorge, which the old peasant had called *la Valle Calda*.

Leaving the town of Busalla, my road struck off from the main highway across the Giove, from that

highway which was in olden times the traveller's only route from Turin to Genoa. It is still studded along with many a little wayside inn, now forlorn and impoverished, where carriage-loads of foreigners used to stop in days gone by, while their horses were baiting. These little inns have sunk nowadays to the lower rank of '*bettole*' or taverns; since the making of the railway they lack the custom which raised them into '*alberghi*', and no longer profess to find beds, but only to supply the wayfarer or the waggoner with food and drink. Nevertheless the '*bettole*' are still distinctive features, and picturesque with a purely Italian picturesqueness.

The branch road up the valley of the Scrivia is not at first sight inviting. Poor and dirty buildings of the town's outskirts flank its ill-paven and narrow streets, but squalid houses are soon left behind, and the country opens out before and around you. As I have said before, it is a free landscape, even though the hills stand about on every side closing in the valley, and though, looking up toward the farther end of it, you can see that the land grows more mountainous, and that the cones and shoulders of hills seem to lie up more cumbrously against the horizon. But they are not mountains whose peaks tower into the sky, neither are their sides made up of cliffs and dark ravines. They are scarcely perhaps high enough and important enough even to

deserve the name of mountains—these slimly moulded and graceful hills, daintily muffled in luxuriant vegetation—excepting that they are so amply cultivated where the chestnut woods are not, that something of their height is lost, perhaps, because their nature is so like the nature of the plains ; the plains, that are no more than narrow little strips of level land from which cultivation creeps up the steep slopes ; for patches of corn-field, of maize and potato crops, intersected with vineyards and trellises, find room on many a tiny ledge or terrace of earth till the whole land wears a look of careful plenty.

Even the timber vegetation of the country has a sort of prodigality in its beauty, which seems to tell how the broad-leaved chestnut trees are not only fair to behold but also bountiful in service. They wear a promise of warmer tones now over their brilliant summer colouring, for the autumn has just begun to shed a new influence abroad, and faintly golden tints speak of the fruit-time of the year, after the sunnier time of flowers and scents is over. The whole land has a flush of this new promise. Harvest is over, and the corn-fields are laid bare, yet there is a golden burnished hue upon the ground where the yellow stubble is left upon the yellow clay soil. The vintage is not yet gathered in, so that the vines have lost none of their beauty, but that rather the cool purple-red of their luscious fruit-

clusters, near to that other warmer red which is faint as yet upon the gracefully-turning tendrils and broad leaves of their foliage, serves to help the warm painting of the whole. As far as the eye can see, gold and green mingle in subtle harmony. A faintest fancy of coming gold in the chestnut woods, the steadier gold and yet pale of the cropped fields, the gold that almost deepens into brown where patches of ploughed land lie here and there upon the hillsides and in the valley, and through the whole the golden-winding thread of the river.

This is the valley of the Scrivia, from whose main course that side gorge creeps up, among the mountains, to the village of Savignone and the feudal castle. At its foot a mountain stands sentinel to all the little quiet and cosy villages within the precinct below—a tall mountain, uprising many hundreds of feet in one solid mass, but indented with many clefts and water-courses, and cut at its summit into many sharp peaks, each different in shape and in size, and all lying clear and fine against the sky. Here the river winds in closer coils, and its rough bed spreads across the valley ; for soon the water gathers itself together, since it is somewhere in the fissures of Monte Baneo or her range that the Scrivia has its birth. At the foot of the sentinel mountain you may see a little white town lodged—and

this is the town, more properly called the village, of Casella.

All this you will have seen on before you and beside you as you walked up along the stony road from Busalla. The stream has been flowing at your left, and on your right were chestnut woods growing up into the hills, and turf and moss that spread beneath them, and little hamlets dotting the wayside, and blackberry hedges by the road. Many little torrents bubble across the footpath—streams that must be crossed on the roughest of stepping-stones, for only the village called '*Ponte di Savignone*' boasts a stone bridge across the river for those who are bound for the Baths, and here are houses gathered on either side of the bridge, finer looking than the smoke-coloured and thatched cottages. From this point the main road of the Scrivia valley runs on the farther side of the water.

But I, in my evening ramble, was not bound for the high road nor for the town of Casella, that lies at the valley's foot. The old *contadino* had spoken of the mountain's eastern side, when he had pointed across the gorge to the slopes lying opposite, and he had spoken of it as *la Valle Calda*. I did not therefore cross the stone bridge again, but holding to the right, went in search of this new valley. No carriage—not even the brave one offered to my notice the evening

before at Busalla—could have held its way upon this road, for the stones lay looser and larger than ever upon it, and, as it went farther into the hills, it narrowed, and grew more and more uneven. Monte Baneo still stood up before me with the valley and the river at its feet, and to westward the slopes of Antola. Little cottages began to appear in clusters upon meadows and peeping from among woods; blue smoke curled into the air from dells and copses, showing where other human habitations lay hid; then the *Campanile* came to sight. It stood close against the hill, and as I came nearer the bells began gently to chime with glad-some rhythm for the morrow's feast of Saint or Virgin.

This was *La Valle Calda*; and as I stood gazing on the soft and quiet scene there came an old woman along the road who went across the mountains weekly with new-laid eggs to sell, and she, greeting me friendly, as all these peasants do, told me many things of the country and of the neighbours, and commanding me heartily for my genuine admiration of this valley of her home, she bade me turn my walk once more to the right till I should reach a village called, she said, *La Madonna della Vittoria*, for there should I behold a view worth the seeing indeed!

So towards the east I turned again, and climbed my way into the chestnut woods. I left the river behind

that had been flowing on my left through green meadows as I walked from Ponte towards the chief village of *La Valle Calda*. I left even this semblance of a high road, running parallel with the real high road on the stream's opposite shore which had seemed so close in the summer air that I had heard the laughter of the *vetturino* as he drove his infirm vehicle, and chattered with his passengers, or urged his horse by loud vociferations.

My new way was nothing but a mountain path, and a steep one—for *La Madonna della Vittoria* stands on a hill. The foot-track winds up between chestnut groves, rising higher and higher above the banks of a mountain torrent that in autumn and winter time is turbulent in its downward rush to the river. Now and again little hamlets appear, whose houses are ranged and huddled on both sides of the path; the road grows steeper, and the sides of the ravine, in whose deep the torrent gurgles, are rough and jagged as you look down upon them. In this side valley the country is wilder and more bleak, for there is less room for cultivation. The path creeps round an angle of the hill, and the long ridge is in sight, where *La Madonna della Vittoria* stands between two heads of the mountain. The place takes its name from a little oratory, sacred to the Virgin of that title. People come hither in pilgrimage from

the parish church ; and in times of blight or of pestilence, of rains or of long drought, processions are frequent. The chapel is beyond the village, a little farther up on the hill. If you mount the street and the flight of stone steps that is at the end of the village, you will come upon the little mound on which stands the oratory. The piazza is a paved enclosure with a low stone wall and a stone bench that runs round hemming it in. There are acacia trees and cypresses against the church, and upon its front a worn and faded image of the Madonna, with sceptre and crown and glory, stands where it has stood for many a year within shallow niche to receive the winds and the rain and the people's obeisance.

A sharp air blows of an evening around this little piazza upon the hill, a breeze that is keen to refresh and yet soft enough to soothe. Sitting upon the little low wall, it blows around, while your looks stray over the goodly country spread out beneath and about you. Ranges upon ranges of hills set a girdle on every side. But they are not hills that tell of a mountainous land far ahead, as do the hills of Savignone. There is a vague sense of space and freedom here, for we have turned our faces back again towards the sea. The distance that your eye can scan seems measureless : hills as far as you can see—tier rising

behind tier, the higher peaks standing forward and the lower ones peering forth, as it were, from betwixt their shoulders ; hills on every side, but hills whose outlines sink and grow dim in the filmier light as they near the sea far away. At first the mountains seem so thickly wedged upon the soil that no room can remain for places of human habitation ; but as you gaze, you see how the rivers flow down from them, growing wider in their course, and with space for towns upon the banks. Far out ahead, where the blue air grows paler, the dim sky sinks down into a silvery line, that is the Mediterranean. And, perhaps, if the sunset has been clear, and if the vapours have not arisen to muffle it, you may see in the vague distance other things that are dim, yet more solid in their dimness, and these are the islands of the sea ; and further up, beyond the sky-line, forms of dazzling whiteness, and these are peaks of the Maritime Alps ; while below, in the nearest valley, the town of Ponte Decimo gleams out in the last of the sunlight, and *La Madonna della Vittoria* looks down upon it all.

The old *pedona* had been right when she told me it was worth while to climb the hill for the sake of the view at its top. I sat a while on the wall of the little *piazza* watching the evening vapours creep down from the mountains, and feeling their breath on my cheek.

Women with children clinging to their skirts, and small, swaddled babies in their arms, came to make their evening prayer in the sanctuary—to have their evening gossip in its porch. They greeted me with courteous grace, and one of them talked long with me, telling me of the neighbourhood and of its people—rambling on with stories of her own and of many other villages. They have the true grace of perfect unconsciousness, the dwellers in these little Apennine homes, and have no conventionalities, since each acts upon the moment's impulse that he may enjoy life to the full. I call them all to mind, those simple friends of a time long past, and, as I think of them, I think of summer days when breezes moved silently amid leaves, and the air was white with heat as it lay clear above the tender green of chestnut trees.

I think of little rough and quaint villages that are the homes of these my friends, and, best of all, I remember one village that stands beneath the crest of a hill, with shady woods and orchards to girdle it about. Another hill lies over against it, whose graceful form I seem to see as I write—soft shapes, yet varied that rest upon the sky, subtle waves and indentations of earth, with which play the lights and shades of the day-light. It is that village of *La Valle Calda*, towards which I turned my steps again after I had looked on the

fair scene from *La Vittoria's* hill. A church stands for centre to the parish—that church with tall *campanile* and blue-painted belfry—and, beside the church, an oratory, where the memory of some special saint is sacred ; but the parish itself is scattered far and wide through copse and over meadow, in hamlets that stand beside streams or on hill-tops.

The steeple is nevertheless, here as elsewhere, the beacon that can gather all neighbours together, and beneath it is a piazza with stone benches around, where at Ave Maria my memory confidently returns to recall each one of those faces seen long ago. I know I shall find them there, for I know they must have a goodly portion of gossip and loitering, and am fain indeed to confess that if foreign sayings about Italian impetuosity, and easily moved Italian feelings, have been often exaggerated, these Apennine country people are, on the other hand, no taciturn race. They are cunning to mould to their use the lithe tongue of their land, to adorn it with expletives, and to point it with gesticulation ; and it is even this habit of noisy vociferation which has perhaps won them abroad the character—so little deserved—for curbless passions and vindictively cruel propensities. For they are a kindly people in their mutual relations, and formed by their very nature for warm, social life, since they need a free neighbourly in-

tercourse, such as quiet and colder temperaments can scarcely understand.

Hence it is that the life of an Italian community, unlike the comparatively secretive life of northern lands, is to be learned in its open thoroughfares rather than its individual homes, and that we must seek on cottage door-steps, in market-places and piazzas, where men and women mix freely together, the true colour of the Italian people.

### At the Chestnut Harvest.

As October days draw nigh to their end there is festival in the cottages of North Italy. Walking at evening among her mountains and passing through her homely villages, a red light of wood fire comes streaming upon you from open cabin doors and from between the chinks of clumsy window-shutters, and noisy sounds of revelry fall around. For this is the season when the chestnuts are ripe, and the peasants are making merry by dark, for the work they have had during the hours of day, and they are glad for that harvest which is to them the most bounteous of the year.

In autumn, thunder-storms lower in the Apennine valleys. Torrents grow turbulent, hurling themselves in foam from the hills around, and rivers that, in the long drought, have grown meagre, swell rapidly to great size, fed by rains amid the mountains and by the hundred little streamlets and torrents that cast themselves noisily down ravines. The river-beds are wide—so wide that in summer their barren expanse of shingle looks ill

amid the green land—yet now there is often no room within them for the mass of moving water. It overflows the banks and swamps the near-lying cultivation, till the maize plantations lie dashed and the meadows are soft, like bogs. It carries away the little temporary bridges which, spring after spring, are newly set across the streams ; scarcely can it flow, sometimes, beneath the arches of more stable bridges that, here and there, are built for greater security ; it damages the weirs, and brooks no obstacle in its way, flowing swiftly—a great muddy, turbid stream, that bears upon its breast the trunks or the branches of trees and many other spoils from off the banks. And year after year the people know that this may all happen, yet year after year they take no precautions to shield themselves from evil ; they build up no embankments, turn aside the course of no injurious waters, only, laughing they say, or sighing, ‘It is time that the great waters descend.’

And during the present month they are almost sure to descend, once, at least, with all their power of devastation, for the best of the sunshine has taken its leave of the land by the end of October. Down in the more level parts of the valleys, where the meadows lie, little cottages look out ruefully from amid the dripping walnuts, their thatched roofs damp and glistening in the wet ; and higher up, among the chestnut woods, sad

leaves lie damp upon the ground, where the mossy turf is so moist, that mushrooms are spoiled ere they be grown. The country looks tenderly forlorn, that was so gay with its vintage in September. Trees shed their foliage early in chestnut-wooded districts, and already tints have little left that is freshly green, but leaves are yellow upon boughs, and scattered day by day more thickly to earth. There is no hot sunshine, no blue light that is misty with heat ; yet the valleys can still smile in their soberer mood when chance and glorious sunbeams strike across the land, or when the rain ceases and bright days come back, here and there, with warmer breezes. Swollen rivers abate if the deluge cease only for a day, and as you walk upon their banks the waters are limpid again, yet green from their depth with an intenser colour.

And wandering beneath the chestnuts, no sense of damp or dreariness oppresses now that sunshine is abroad once more, for yellow-tinted leaves wave brightly overhead, and yellower leaves, that are scattered, rustle pleasantly beneath your feet, while now and again a quick sound breaks the stillness, and that is the fall of the fruit. Since the middle of October you might have heard it when you were in the woods, for the chestnuts began to ripen at that time and the brown-burnished fruit to peep from out its prickly shell.

But scarcely before the end of the month does the chestnut harvest begin in earnest in the Apennines. There are divers kinds of chestnuts, and the gathering of each dates properly from a different day : the so-called ‘timely chestnuts,’ that ripen before the commoner sorts—but this variety is rarer and the fruit finer than that of others—the late chestnuts, such as, of their own accord, do not fall sometimes till November—though these trees are often thrashed during the general harvest for the greater convenience of the gatherers.

Companies of women and girls greet you now upon your walks. They have little bags of sackcloth slung around their waists, and rough wooden tweezers in their hands, with which they open the spiked husks, where the fruit lies yet in its green case. They are merry ; they laugh and talk, their shrill Italian voices sounding shriller to English ears in the harsh Genoese dialect. It is a season of festivity. The *festa* of the ‘*Santi*’ has but lately passed, and there is much interchange of colloquial news and much surmising on parish matters, with a little gossip and neighbourly scandal mixed therewith.

The ‘*Santi*’ is the last great feast of the year until Christmas be come, and it is treated with much solemnity throughout the whole of Italy. The ‘*Giorno dei Morti*’ is likewise a great day among the people, but

then the pageant is one of mourning and of woe. Black garments are donned by those who have lost friends during the year, and little charms and candles are sold throughout the streets of the towns, with black and yellow garlands of everlastings, with which people are wont to adorn the graves. Yet there always seems to be as much excitement around this day as any other. Southern feelings love so dearly to be moved, that apparently it matters little whether it be to joy or to grief.

However, this great homage to the day of the dead seems to be confined more to the cities, and beneath the chestnuts, where our people are gathering up the harvest, there is little talk of sadness. Here a man has come to the aid of the girls, and has climbed to the top of a huge tree, that he may the better thrash down the fruit. It falls in prickly showers upon the crackling dead leaves below, but the women seem little to fear any hurt from thorns, for they tread boldly amid the heap, often with bare feet, and take the harsh shells within their hands to open them. All day the people are at work. They are almost all women at this task, for the men are labouring in the fields. Some few of them return home at midday to cook and to carry the dinner for brothers and husbands without, but most of them remain in the woods till dusk, and eat their cold '*polenta*' at midday, resting

upon the banks. Towards dark the great baskets are piled up that have been filled all day from each woman's sack, and then the girls lift them upon their heads or their shoulders, and pick their way deftly along the



GATHERING THE CHESTNUTS.

stony paths with the burthens. Sometimes the loads are too heavy and must be left for the men, but this does not often happen, for these peasant women are strong, with a beautiful ease of strength, and proud of their power.

So, whether the day has been dark and cheerless, or whether the kind autumn sunshine has been there to brighten up all anew into a beauty more beautiful than summer-time, the women have been at work in the woods, and now the recreation hour has come. Within cottages great fires are lit upon hearths that are in the chamber's midst, and the pot is put on to boil ; rough wooden benches are drawn around, and men and women meet after their labour to commemorate, with fun and jollity, the first of the chestnuts. Upon each successive evening they meet in different cottages according to the help they have lent to one another during the day ; land is not rented in the Apennines, neither do the people labour for pay, but each has his small home-stead according to his wealth, and cultivates the ground himself, men and women helping their neighbours during every pressing season, as they themselves expect to be helped in turn.

When the '*minestra*' has been eaten, or the '*poccenta*,' then the pot is taken off, with the great chain from whence it hung, and the '*padella*' is brought forth, upon which chestnuts are to be roasted. The red wood fire flares and flickers upon the hearth amid its heap of embers, throwing fitful dashes of light upon faces around—copper vessels and platters make sudden gleam upon dingy walls. Again the bold flames die away,

and there is only a lurid mass of cinders, and then the women toss chestnuts in the pan and the men slit the brown hide of other chestnuts that are yet unroasted, and they all chatter and gesticulate the while in a fashion so quick and eager and with voices so high and thrilling, that foreign ears, to whom the shrill dialect is unknown, might fairly hear therein the words of an angry quarrel.

And sometimes there are quarrels even at these scenes of merriment. Italian natures are hot, and Italian women are jealous, besides being coquettes too, in their way, with often prudent or mercenary considerations, so that wrangles come and altercations ; but they make it up again most times, and do not seem to break their hearts.

The women are not, as a rule, beautiful hereabouts. They are superbly built and powerful, with graceful movements, but their faces belong to a heavy-featured type that lacks much in delicacy of form, even though the ruddy pallor of colouring might atone for many deficiencies. The splendour of dark eyes can sometimes scarcely kindle them into real brilliancy, nevertheless these women have their lives to live and their wars to wage, and they bear the tokens, in themselves beautiful, of toil and the labour of living.

The chestnut harvest lasts some three weeks or

more, and, when the fruit is all gathered in, it is spread above the open rafters that form the roof of every kitchen in these Italian cottages—there to be dried during winter by the fire's heat from below. And when the chestnuts are dried, and the outer skin has been cracked off by the heat, then they are ground in a mill, so that the flour goes to make bread and cakes and porridge during the barren season, when there is little fresh food to be got by the poor. The dried chestnuts are boiled whole likewise, and in one form or another the common production of the woods provides nourishment, during this time, for all the peasants throughout the land.

## Under the Cherry Trees.

### *The Bridal.*

SUMMER sunshine lies gladly upon the green hill-sides of *la Valle Calda*. It moves in broken light over the warm green of broad-leaved chestnut trees that daintily sweep the turf with their branches, it quivers across the stream's passing wave, or rests in a sheet of silver upon the still pools of the slowly flowing river. Flowers bloom gayer and breathe forth a stronger scent for its goodly radiance, summer fruits ripen the sooner. For these are June days, that I call to mind, as I think of *la Valle Calda*, that fairest of North Apennine valleys, and the wild cherries are ripe upon the land, the lads and the maidens are merry, for to-morrow is the Feast of St. John and the bridal day of Caterina Ponte.

In the hamlets around, excitement has waxed high these many days past. St. John is the patron saint of this little church that stands so simply beside the green background of the richly-wooded mountain, with belfry tower whose top seems almost to lie against the far horizon clouds. St. John is the saint to whom most honour

is due from the dwellers in this particular parish. There will be a procession to-morrow, and that would be grave enough matter, even without the wedding of the prettiest girl in our village.

Down by the river's brink, where the tall cherry trees grow whose large black fruit will not be ripe yet awhile, the morrow's bride has had her home these twenty years long. Her cottage roof is thatched and moss-grown, as the roofs of all the other cottages that are here gathered together into a hamlet—one of the many hamlets that go to make up the parish.

The father's homestead, where Caterina has lived away her life till to-day, is nothing but a low, one-storeyed house, that has no chimney to its roof and no glass to its windows, blackened around where the smoke has made its way; there are rough wooden shutters to keep out the night air and the coldest of winter blasts, but, in these happy dog-days, is no need to fear the fresh breath of the outside breezes, and, upon the sills, carnations bloom in pots, with marjoram and rosemary for the soup-flavouring, and marsh-mallow for the healing of hurts. The stone steps are uneven that lead to the threshold; the kitchen is dark, above the loose rafters of which chestnuts lie all winter time to dry with the heat of the fire below; a great black pot is hanging now over the red embers on the square

centre-hearth, and Caterina knows every dint in those bright copper vessels that gladden the gloomy walls —every sunken brick in the floor. No wonder she sorrows a little to leave the hard bench where she has sat so often to fan the flame or—one among many—to roast chestnuts of an autumn evening ; no wonder she drops a passing regret to the broken stone balcony without the door, where oftentimes she has stood gossiping with neighbours beneath the trellised vine or has listened to the ready vows of village swains ! Though she be going to a better cottage, where there are windows and even a chimney, Caterina can still be sorry to leave the yellow gourd flowers that trail across the ground in the garden of her girlhood, will still perchance miss awhile the Michaelmas daisies, the sunflowers, the tomatoes, and even her own pet fruit-orchard stretching across green grass towards the river. But though she sigh a furtive sigh for all this, the vows of the one particular swain have been heard and registered now, so there must be a good-bye for ever to anything the others might have had to say, and this must be the last day even for the gossip of a maiden.

Where the land leaves the river-side and swells up into hills, wild cherries grow better than in low-lying orchards, and it is the wild cherries that are ripe for the feast of St. John ; so that now, while it is yet daytime,

girls of the village are still plucking the fruit, up among those further plantations, nor will be down till dark for the last chat beneath the vine of Caterina's maiden home.

The trees are small and slender trees whereon grow the *amarene*, bitter wild cherries of our country, and it needs but the deftness of a light-footed mountain girl quickly to climb them, while the strength of some other tall Apennine maiden can boldly reach down branches with long arm and lithe figure, cruelly to strip them of the glistening, ruddy fruit.

Margaret and Virginia, Paula and Bianca are there at work, and they are favourite friends of the bride, and will hold a good place in the morrow's ceremonies.

'Yes, yes, he is rich, I tell you ; she will be married in no dress of homespun ! The stuff is to be of real wool ! You will see !' says one. 'What luck, and she the poorest of us all,' sighs another damsels for reply, and breaks the full-laden bough of a low little tree as she speaks. 'But I grudge her no good fortune. Our turn will come, girls, and meanwhile who can put the garlic so justly into the pot, who can knead the maize so smoothly or the dough for household bread, who can mend a man's suit or iron his shirt better than Caterina of the Walnut Cottage ?' The bride's old home is thus named in the parish because of the fine nut trees that

grow beside and around it. ‘ See the fine cherry bough,’ pursues this last speaker ; ‘ she shall have it for gift in sign of prosperity.’ The luscious, bright fruit hangs in richest clusters from this slender stem ; such tender stalks seem scarce able to uphold the heavy knots. Beside the crimson berries grow tufts of pale leaves, the same leaves that a moment before have had the soft blue sky behind their young green for background and the summer sunlight shining through them. ‘ Truly it is pretty !’ say the girls in chorus, and then they all agree that Caterina has deserved so fortunate a fate as that which will be hers to-morrow ere noon, and they slake their thirst with the tart cherry-juice, the while they pile baskets with the spoil, and weary their lungs with talk and laughter, if not their limbs with toil.

So do evening shadows begin to creep over the soft slopes of those tender-carven hills, begin to lie darkly in their ravines ; and when the ebbing sunlight is near to leaving the frail outlines alone upon the sky, then the bells of St. John’s strike their gladsome chime, for to-morrow is the day of the patron saint. It is the girls’ token that the day is done, and each lifts a basket to the head of a comrade ere, with firm step—the step that comes easy to women of such strong and graceful figure—they descend the mountain path towards home and a gossip with the bride. And all the while the

bells are ringing so noisily, so wildly hurrying in merriest triplets, so loudly pealing with deep bass voice now and then, that even Virginia's clear tones, and the chatter of other three good lungs besides, can scarce make themselves heard above the din.

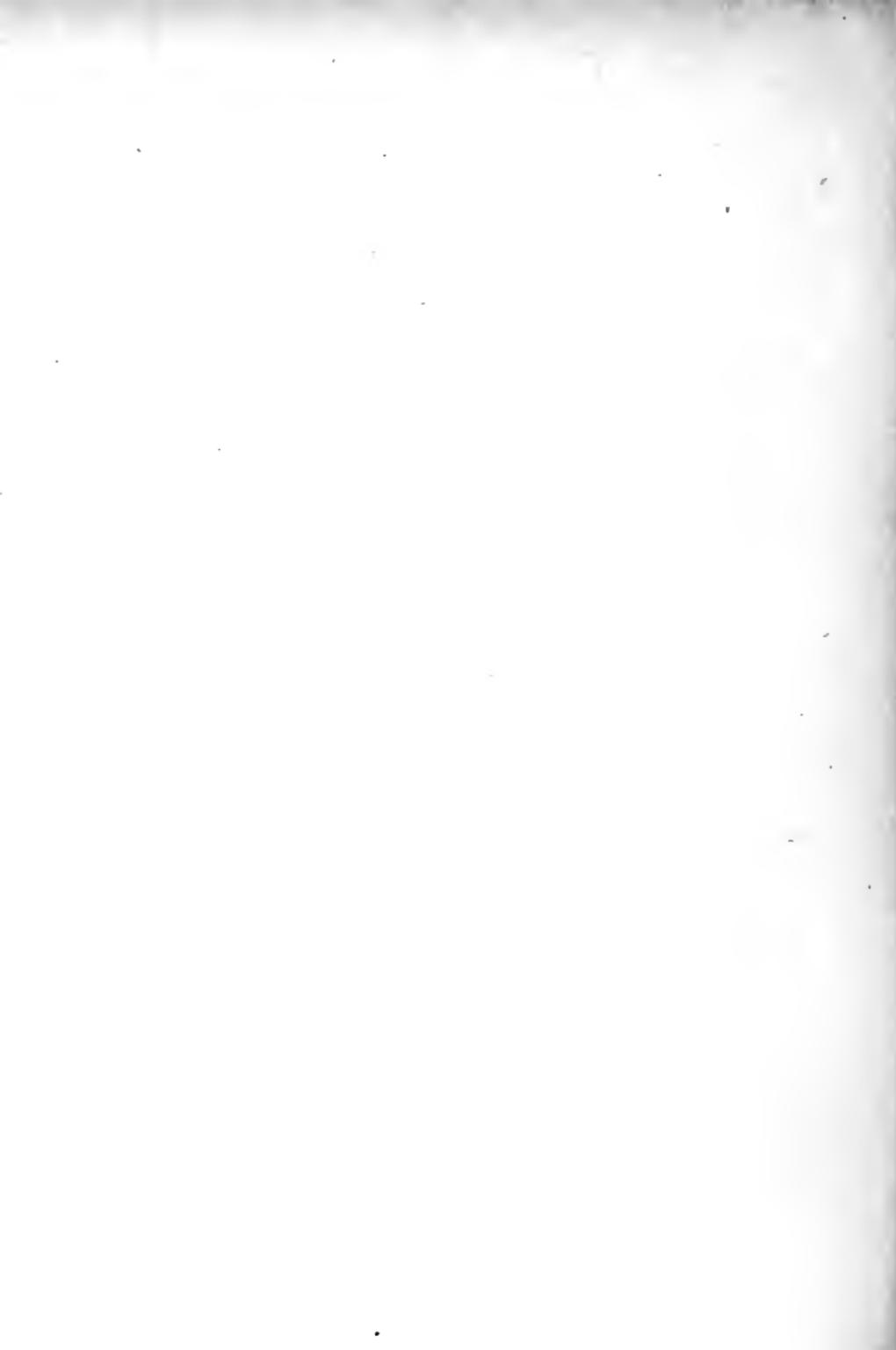
If yesterday was a happy day when things were bright and hearts were glad, to-day is better a thousand times, with sun that is hotter and land that lies fairer before the eyes : so thinks the bride, and so think those four girls who are the bride's friends. Many a little half-hour went by last night while these five told old tales and fancied new wonders, as they sat on the old wall beneath the vine, in the growing summer darkness. The wedding gown was handled and criticised, so were the wedding garments and the bride's little dowry of household linen, that she and her mother and her mother's sister had been spinning and weaving on the rough hand-loom these many months past. So was that fine young man criticised—the betrothed—who had been able to furnish his house so suitably, and had given the bridal gold of such massive weight and fine workmanship!

But past discussions, past surmises are all over now : the wedding morning is here. Upon the hedgerows that hem the path all the way from this river-side hamlet to the church, there has glossy homespun linen been hung in long lengths for adornment, with red and yellow

*Gossip.*

These five told old tales and fancied new wonders, as they sat on the old wall beneath the vine, in the growing summer darkness.





church properties between, that have belonged to the vestry for processions these twenty years. This is all for St. John's Day, and so are the flower-heads of gorse and poppy that strew the ground, the fresh-plucked posies in the little shrine on the bridge. But Caterina gets the benefit of it all notwithstanding.

The marriage is to be at eleven. It will not be in the church, but when the ring has wedded bride and bridegroom, and the sacred words that bind them have been spoken by the priest in the priest's own house, then Caterina and her husband will come before the great altar for benediction, and that is the only part of a wedding which the congregation may see in Italy. The villagers are nevertheless assembled on the *piazza* just in front of the church, that they may see the bridal pass, because the priest's house is just behind the church, and even Caterina, in all her glory, must pass under the arch of the belfry, and up between the two trimmed box-hedges to-day, just as she has passed up many a time before with the tithes in kind or the priest's best linen from the wash.

All the village children cry aloud, for the bride is in sight. 'See! the dress is really of woollen stuff,' whisper the women, and the men make comment on her comely person, for truly Caterina is a pretty girl. Her white stockings and clean bright shoes are neat (small

are the dainty feet they clothe, say the village swains); her dress is costly for a peasant bride, the gold about her neck—gold that is no vanity here, because it is the bride's invariable marriage portion—the gold in her ears and hair is of good quality, the muslin veil is fresh and fine, that drapes head and figure, after her country's costume; but best of all is Caterina's proud and merry face, best are her deep, brown eyes, her strong, lithe frame, and the healthy blood that flows beneath her olive skin. Caterina is a handsome girl, but, more precious in the sight of her bridegroom, she is a sound woman, fit to be a peasant's wife.

Laughing—half with shyness, half with pleasure—the bride and the bride's mother pass first through the little archway: the wedding party follows after. In the kitchen of the priest's house—which is the entrance to his oratory and to all the rest of his abode—more admiration, more talk and wonderment from the old housekeeper, delay the couple awhile on their road. Caterina must be examined from top to toe while the men stand impatient at such female frivolity, and the guests are gathered, waiting, beneath the wide-spreading vine-trellis of the priest's garden, or beside the trickling fountain in its midst. Everybody is glad when the ring has been put on—(Caterina has already twenty-three gold rings on different fingers, all

part of her only dowry)—everybody sighs a little sigh of relief when the last Latin words have been spoken, of that ceremony which is about the same in all lands and in all religions. Nothing of importance occurs—only once a candle on the altar goes out unaccountably, and Caterina is frightened at the evil omen—a woman and an Italian peasant, she must needs be superstitious! But all the same, it serves for conversation at the wedding feast. The priest has had his comfit-box with the gold coins hidden within it; the old housekeeper has not been forgotten, since this bridegroom is not of the poorest; the wedding party descend into the church.

And, when the exhortations are said and the benediction has been given, Caterina is quite a married woman. The neighbours may have their fill of comment and admiration now, and the children their portion of comfits which Caterina scatters among them. Good words and bad words—ejaculations and laughter—fly to and fro, and resound under the trees of the cherry orchard, where they eat the marriage feast. Everybody is contented. Even the girls who have no husbands, and the fathers who have more mouths to feed than money withal to feed them, are glad to-day; for the sun shines and the harvests are all yet to come, and the winter is a long way off, and the bells ring merrily, for it is the Feast of St. John. And when they have done

ringing for morning ceremonies and the marriage, they begin again for afternoon ceremonies and the procession. There, Caterina walks with her husband, and sees Bianca in her own old place, carrying the great cross in front. The pop-guns are fired, the procession has been round the meadows by the well, and is near home again. And the bells' ringing dies away slowly, as banners and crosses are lowered beneath the porch. The lads and lasses have their simple dance on the green by the river, and the day of St. John sinks away into night.

Cherry trees still bloom and bear fruit in that North Apennine valley. Walking in and out amid the little frail trees, brushing the quaker's grass and ragged robin, and treading down the buttercups and daisies, you might look up to see the ripe and ruddy fruit overhead, and listening, hear just such joyous voices as I have written of—voices of laughing maidens stripping the orchards' cherry-trees. But Caterina would not be there, nor Virginia nor Bianca, nor any of the girls that I know, even though upon the stillness of the waning day there might come to you a sound of bells—joyful pealing bells—such as those that ring in the Feast of St. John.

## The Parish Priest.

IT IS the day of the Corpus Domini. As though to herald in the sun, bells began to ring this morning from every church throughout the valley. For this is a great feast. It does not belong more to San Matteo than to San Luca, nor can even *la Madonna* claim it for a special honour: it is the property of every village, of every saint, and of every parish. That little church niched in among the chestnuts has, therefore, just as good a right to sound her peal in the grey hours of the morning as has any other *campanile* throughout this valley of the Northern Apennines. We are among the mountains of the Polcevera—in one of the numerous indentures of the land, scarcely large enough to deserve a more important name, which serve to vary and make more beautiful this already richly gifted portion of the country.

Twenty miles away from us is the Mediterranean, and on the other side of us lie the plains of Lombardy, white with the sun's heat as it rests on the rice plantations. But here there is not even a remembrance either

of plains or of sea. We are in the depth of the country, where the view has no monotony as of the flat, or even as of the sea, when it is unruffled by wind, and dazzling beneath the sun's power of this summer time. The horizon's margin is broken by the outline—now gently undulating, now jagged—of hills against a limpid sky ; the foreground is varied—hill and dale, rugged wildness and careful cultivation, subtly balancing each other as separate effects in the landscape's picture.

The scenery is characteristic of the Northern Apennines : a river gently flowing, and many a little quiet spring, thickly-growing chestnut woods—where the trees are not always tall and spreading, but somehow always shady—mossy banks that are green for Italy, and the land divided into plots and terraces, where each man grows his own corn and beans and potato-crops, gathers his own maize, and trains his own vines. The strawberries are nearly over—little rough, red fruit, that grows wild and luscious among the grass and the turf in the spring-time : but the glory of the fruit season is all to come. Large yellow plums and little blue plums, peaches and apricots, medlars, figs, grapes, melons, blackberries that are as large as mulberries, all these will follow one another in time, and great handsome golden gourds, with every kind of vegetable : now it is the season of the cherries. There are tall

trees whereon the fruit grows small and jet black, and others whose berries are large, and sweet according to the usual shape and savour of their kind ; but the type of the Apennines at this season is the *amarena*. The little trees are small and graceful, growing over the hill-side, often so low that the fruit can be plucked by the mere outstretching of a strong arm from the strong and graceful figure of an Apennine damsels. The *amarene* are ripe for the Corpus Domini, and the bright red fruit, with the merriment of its ingathering, makes the brightest of all the bright colours in memory's picture of these festivals of summer's prime.

The long grass is not all yet mown, and among it the ragged robin, the buttercup, scabius, and ox-eyed daisy have woven a medley of merry colour ; while, upon the river's banks, meadow-sweet blooms, and higher up among the budding heather a golden field of yellow gorse. This forms the floral feature of the festivities. Yesternight, in the long June evening, after work was done, girls and boys wandered up the hill-sides, and, in their aprons, the maidens stored the golden bloomlike chaff. Then, when the bells awoke this morning at daybreak, the women rose to spread, along the highway before their dwellings, yards and yards of newly-bleached linen, spun with their own hands, and woven on the homely looms—a snow-white carpet on which to strew the gay blossoms. Upon the

hedges, and hanging from the windows of the little cottages, bright crimson draperies and curious heirlooms are not wanting to honour the way where the sacred procession is to pass. Merrily the bells jangle—trills and triplets up and down—with the deep-toned first bell tumbling in now and then as bass, to add the necessary touch of solemnity. The ringers have been at work for hours. The first mass has been sung, and the second will soon be coming on, but the procession will not be till after vespers. The *parroco* (or parish priest) stands on the piazza in black gown and biretta. He has said his say in church, and has no further work till afternoon : he is a peasant again, among his peasant flock, as he is on week-days, with only the faint halo of skirts and head-gear to keep him from his pipe and the broadest of his jests.

‘His reverence will walk himself in procession this afternoon?’ asks a lean peasant.

‘Surely, yes,’ replies the priest. ‘I would not if I could help myself, but the parish is not content unless I go through the farce myself for them. The Virgin grant a breeze, or we shall die of heat under the panoply, with the chin buried in devotion !’

‘Truly!’ laughs another peasant, a pipe in his mouth. ‘It’s poor work being a priest. And a fine sermon it was you preached, though! I wasn’t in .

church myself, not longer than for my duty at the right minute, but my wife told me! A woman's not to steal excepting her husband's drunk, and then it's her duty to take the gains from his pocket for the household's benefit. Sound religion! But the women aren't always to be trusted !'

'No, no ; we preach these things, but you do as best you can. There's no telling how things 'll turn out. Now, there's myself even. Preach toleration in church, but, *Corpo di Bacco*, wouldn't I have boxed Luigina's ears, as soon as I was out, if she'd have let me !' Luigina is the priest's cousin—a lady of portly frame and of years that waver 'twixt forty-five and fifty. She lives in two brick-floored rooms on the top storey of the parsonage, lives and dresses like a peasant woman, and would fain have more to do with the priest's household than his old servant permits.

'Signora Luigina's no fool,' laughs the first man ; 'and she's been a companion to you, your reverence.'

'Yes—by the Virgin—thirteen years, more is the pity ! I'd bury her for nothing, poor soul, and shed a good tear afterwards ; but she spoilt those mushrooms all the same, that she cooked me to-day as a favour ! Let the oil get outside them, would you believe !'

'San Pietro—that was enough to drive a saint to swear, much sooner a priest ; and they say she leads you

a life as bad as Caterina does. But what can a man expect when he keeps women in his house that are not tied by the hand of the law ?'

'What can I do ?' objects the priest, laughing, and nothing depressed ! 'One had to choose a profession. Caterina's a good servant, and Luigina is as good as most women when she doesn't force me to a clean shirt. There she is. You there ! Have you picked me out those two clean girls to scatter the flowers before the priest's face in the procession ?'

'I know none so good as myself in the village,' answers the woman, laughing. 'Though it's odd I should scatter flowers before *your* face—only you're not the same man, and that's of course, when once you're under the banner of the Lord !'

'What, and do you think He'd put up with an ugly old scarecrow like you ! Go to. I'll find out the girls for myself.'

'*Santa Madonna !* And you're right,' says the woman, looking round and laughing. 'So much the better for me ! I must see to my own *minestra*. *I'm* not going to eat beans half-cooked, that Nicoletta has put to boil in cold water, so that the Lord's own mercy wouldn't soften them—nor cabbage either, that's not had a scrap of the vice cut out of it ! *Andiamo*, let me be quiet ! *Vossignoria* might be ashamed to be so light-minded at

his age !' A laugh greets the two from around, for the Vicar, forgetful of dignity, has thought fit to inflict summary punishment on the portly shoulders of Luigina, to whom the diminutive scarcely applies ! But the joke is hurriedly thrust aside as the little bell sounds from within the church, which quickly brings the people, priest and peasants alike, to their knees.

The act of devotion is no long penance—it is over almost as soon as begun, and, from the building, the congregation now pours out upon the piazza, mixing with the set of earlier worshippers, and entering busily with them into the pleasures of the present, and the business of before and after as well.

The Corpus Domini is over. The Virgin's statue has been carried in state—hideously painted effigy with her gorgeous and silver trappings—the priest has muttered his say beneath the paloply, walking in the slow pace of the procession, and swearing fitly afterwards at the cruel infliction ; the girls and the young men have vied with one another for who should carry crosses, and banners, and candles ; the children have shouted, the bells have jangled, and the pop-guns been fired. Now the gorse blossoms are trampled and withered, and the linen has been gathered up. Girls are weaving new linen at the loom, and women bleaching it on the river's shingle. The Signor Prevosto is himself again and has ceased to

lament the fearful consumption of beans and pumpkins—no lavish hospitality will be dealt out from the parsonage yet awhile !

Good-bye vain and yet so dearly-prized rejoicings ! Good-bye, till next week ! The priest works in his garden. His spare form needs no longer be hampered with black gown ; his movements have their freedom in the most threadbare of frock-coats, and his eyes may be comfortably shaded by the useful brim of an old straw hat. And the priest's housekeeper shreds peas on the porch step, and scolds neighbours who are remiss in the payment of tithes in kind, or who would presume too far on the generosity of the *Parroco's* garden. He is happy tilling his ground, watering the choicer of his vegetables, pruning his fruit trees, training his vines, and blowing upon them through bellows the sulphur which is to save them from the fell disease.

Now a girl comes to ask his advice on the acceptance of a suitor.

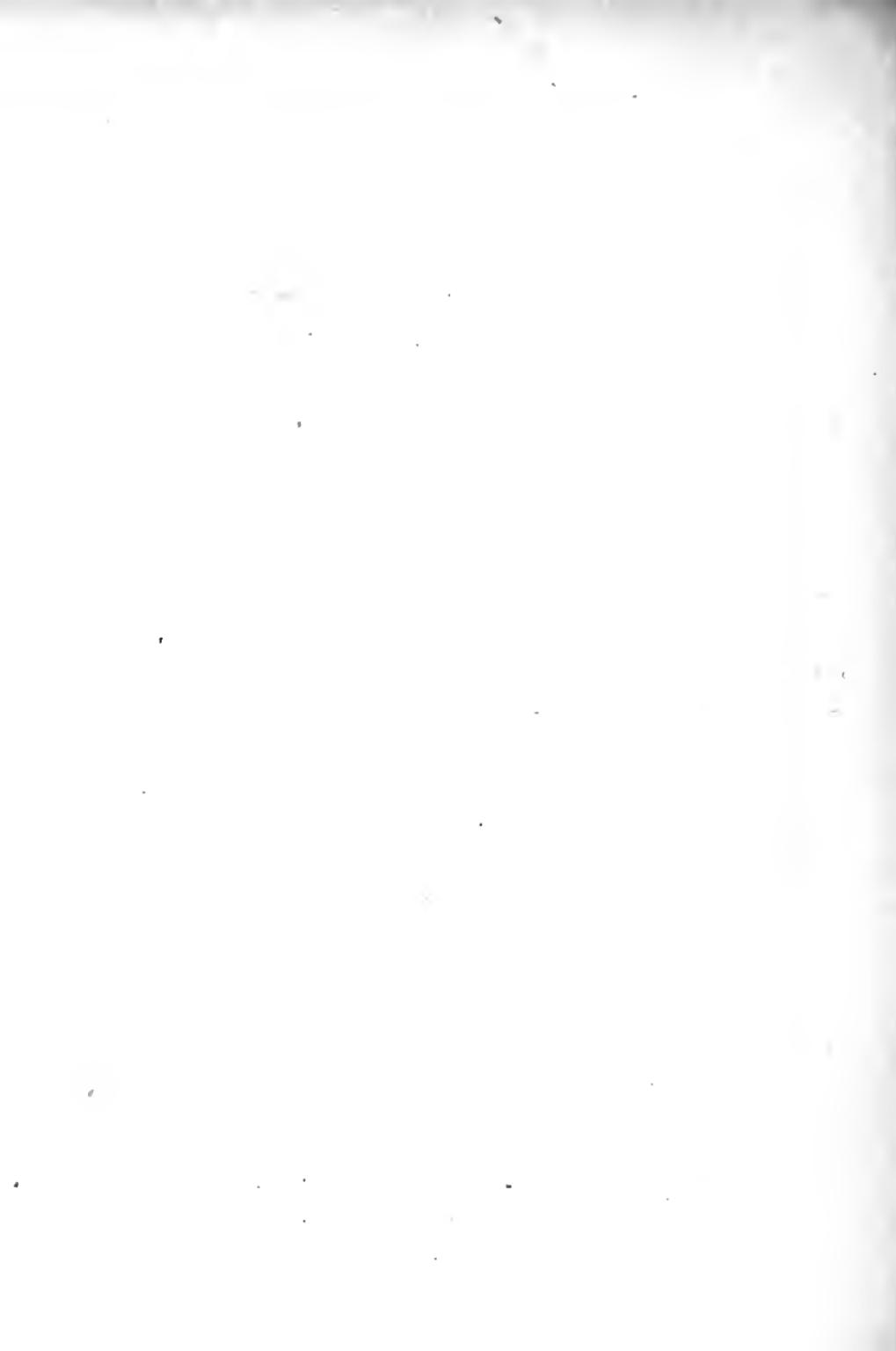
'Marry him, and he has been fitly presented to you by a third party, my child. A damsel must let no man seek her himself,' says the old man, as he hammers at the rotten wood of his pergola, or digs trenches about his maize.

A neighbouring contadino turns up next, to bargain for the sale of a calf. Here the Prevosto is all alert.



### *The Parish Priest.*

"A damsel must let no man seek her himself," says the old man, as he hammers at the rotten wood of his pergola.



His thoughts would be distracted by gardening. The affair must be concluded over a bottle of sour Monferrato.

'Two *marenghi*—why, you take me for a fool! I will give you one, and pay you for ten francs with a portion of the hay from the field of the marshes!'

'*Per Bacco!* But I also am no sucking child! The hay is all rotten. No—a *marengo* and fifteen francs on this table, as the Madonna hears me swear it.'

The bargain is made, the old Parroco has none the worst of it, and the maid, or rather the mistress, Caterina, announces, 'Here is the wife of squinting Giacomo, who bids you quickly to the cottage of Maddalena of the cherry orchard!'

'I come—I come quickly; but why the woman should have owed me such a grudge as to die when the polenta is cooked and I faint from hunger! These peasants are uneducated!' And he hurries to shrive the departing soul—none the less tender-hearted, none the less moved for his rough words of five minutes before; none the less ready, either, to advise the girl whom he meets on his downward path as to the superior usefulness of wool over cotton for a dress, be it for wedding or *prima communione*.

The men chatter to him of crops, the women of sick children, of inconsiderate husbands, of the expense of linen fabric, of the scarcity in eggs, and all the while he

rapidly recites to himself the obligatory office, answering merrily to questions at every breathing space.

Then home to boiled beans and oil, to the perusing of a newspaper, or perhaps, even of a book and certainly to a sharp word-tussle with Luigina, his cousin of upstairs, or with Caterina, the rough and faithful companion of his long years of contented loneliness and poverty. Such is the parish priest.

## The Priest's Serv ing Maid.

THE little footpath that, amid pear and cherry trees, and vine-trelissed '*pergola*,' runs up alongside of the church, leads to the threshold of the *prevosto's* house. The establishment does not boast many rooms, and these are rough and poorly built, with great bare rafters, whitewashed walls and deep embrasured windows. The walls are ill-plastered, so that, when the weather has been hot and the rains heavy, spiders and scorpions can creep from out the cracks ; the doors are cumbrous and unsightly, with great chinks at the hinges, but the rooms are large and lofty as far as may be, and in summer the *curato* is cosy enough.

It is the kitchen that you must enter first, and through it alone can you pass into the rest of the house. Caterina, the maid-of-all-work, stands before the dresser, rolling out the paste for *minestra*. Beans and potatoes, sliced gourd and mushrooms, tomatoes, sweet herbs, and the unfailing garlic are already cooking, so that the kitchen is filled with a fragrant odour. Caterina rolls out the paste, throwing it gracefully over the rolling-pin,

wielding and handling it artfully. She is a gaunt, threadbare-looking woman, of some five-and-thirty years—but the *prevosto* is gaunt too, and sallow; the two match well together.

‘The neighbour, Maddalena, has come to eat two *lasagne* with us,’ says the priest, now entering timidly—for Caterina is a bit of a tyrant. She does not answer now, and he makes a sign to the woman to seat herself upon the stone step at the threshold. There are platters and dishes ranged upon the shelf, and the peasant woman eyes them with interest. There is bread baking, too, in the oven, and Maddalena fancies perhaps that the poor little place wears even an air of opulence.

She sits on the doorstep chattering away fluently in a shrill soprano, that her voice may be heard above the noise of rushing water from without—for there is a fountain beneath the vine *pergola* in the courtyard—a rough little fountain, into which water pours incessantly from a spring above, and from which troughs are laid sometimes to water the flowers and vegetables in the *prevosto’s* little garden. This fountain is well known to the people of the village; there is a back-way to it which does not pass before the priest’s door, and many a time have I seen the villagers, when other springs have run low, filling their pitchers at this spout.

The peasant woman holds the talk herself, for

Caterina makes no answer. She is in a bad humour. Both the women are plain and ill-favoured specimens of their class, only that Caterina is a little less unkempt and disorderly than her neighbour. Her hair is smooth though scant, and her faded print dress is neat; but Maddalena has many different patterns and patches upon her skirt—the bright yellow kerchief around her shoulders is soiled, and the fine and cunning plaits of her grey hair are not as well ordered as the women's are wont to be on mass days.

Presently Caterina bustles into the darkened parlour, where sits the *prevosto* lazily smoking his pipe and reading the country newspaper. He has put aside even the least of his clerical garments now, and lounges at ease in an old coat and slippers, his tonsured head covered by a battered straw hat.

'Listen to me, *Prevosto*,' breaks forth the faithful woman, and she is not careful to modulate her voice even to a semblance of secrecy; 'you don't bring another mouth for me to feed here when it is baking-day again! *Per Bacco!* no, indeed! The mean, grasping creature! She has as much food in her own house as we have in ours any day, and she must come here, forsooth, to delay me in my work, and to pry into my affairs, that she may report them in the village! It's all her laziness. Who's to get the *merenda* for her husband and

her children, I wonder, if she's to find her's ready for her here, whenever she chooses to ask for it! I'm sick of her slanderous tongue. But it shan't happen again,



THE PRIEST'S SERVANT ADMINISTERING A REPROOF.

do you hear? And I have the holy wafers to bake to-day, besides. For shame of you! Come now to your dinner in the kitchen. I'm not going to bring it in here.

You'd best look sharp, for I know there's that dying woman up at San Fedele, you ought to go after. I don't know what you took off your canonicals for!' And Caterina, the better for this free expression, hastens to dish up the *minestra*.

'Poor old priest! What a shrew has he got in his house!' says some pitying reader. Yet he would not part with her for worlds! She is his solace and his right hand, and loves him, besides, none the less because of her sharp and uncurbed speech.

Words in Caterina's mouth are only the natural vent of her quick and eager nature, when the words are spoken to the old priest. For the most part, they are forgotten as soon as uttered, both by master and servant. The lonely man cannot afford to quarrel with mere froth of words in the woman who devotes her life to his comfort. Who would care for him as cares this poor hard-working servant? Who else would lay aside her ease, and forget her people, that she might carry his interests the steadier at heart, the better fight his battles and guard his homestead, and order his goods to advantage?

Yet Caterina is no miracle of a servant. In many a lone and cheerless home of Italian priest can I call to mind such a woman as this—such a fond and faithful drudge, with harsh ways and soft heart! And where

the priest is old, having plodded out his life in some little secluded parish, amid a people more uneducated than himself—there the servant is old also, and the one has almost drifted into a shape and mould of the other's nature and mind. For, as far as home-companionship goes, are these not all-in-all to each other? There is no wife for a comrade, there are no children to keep the old life burning to the end, in these homes of the Roman priesthood. And yet, who shall pretend that they are always sad? If you have been to see them now with me, surely, for all their quarrels, for all her loud voice and his cunningly judged and well-feigned meekness, you will scarcely say this is an unhappy house!

So the *lasagne* are cooked and eaten with a good relish, and Maddalena has her portion upon the door-step, spite of Caterina's vehement remonstrances beforehand. Neither is a little plateful denied to the pretty *contadinella* who comes presently to the door with a summons for the *prevosto*. ‘Did I not tell you that you had best hasten up the hill without further delay?’ says Caterina, sending forth her parting shaft. And the priest sallies out on his mission while the girl gets detained awhile for a gossip. For this one is a favourite; she is young and merry, and comes not too often nor a begging. Caterina loves her well enough.

## Il Signor Cappellano.

THE Signor Prevosto is parish priest, and yet he is little more than a peasant. The *Signor Cappellano* is underpriest, and he is just nothing more than a peasant. '*Abbiate pazienza*,' his own parishioners would say if they were excusing his deficiencies to you ! What would you have ? San Matteo is not a large parish; though its hamlets lie far from one another, and it take a long while on a weary way to bear the Sacrament to the sick, or even to offer homely advice to marriageable girl or ill-used wife, still the parish does not require three priests. And since they are kept merely to say a mass each on Sundays and holy days, why, they must manage with what pay they can get, for the best of the tithes must go to the rectory.

So the *Cappellano* has little to do and little to earn for doing it. The Church gives him a cottage and a slip of barren land that lies mostly alongside of the stream's bed ; the cottage is weathertight and sufficient for himself and his old servant, and, with the aid of heaven's mighty sun and man's patient care, the land

brings forth produce enough to keep two souls and two bodies—what more could an under-priest expect? Michaelmas daisies stand with goodly sunflowers in a row before his porch, brilliant *pomi d'oro* ripen their fruit against the southern wall, while the gourds trail large leaves and golden flowers along the ground, among wheat and beans and potatoes. Neither he nor old Ninetta taste meat more than once a week, but what of that? The *minestra* is as wholesome without, and of *polenta* one never wearies, only the *Signor Cappellano* himself must till the ground and sow and reap and manure again, or even the pumpkins would not grow large nor the maize fill its cones, so how can you expect him to be other than a peasant? ‘*Abbiate pazienza di lui!*’

‘*Frà Giuseppe*’ has the care of the parish school. Perhaps he gets paid a trifle more for it—a trifle that goes towards the meat on *festa* days; be that as it may, if you come down the hill from the ‘Square Village’ towards the church, early upon any morning but a Sunday or a Thursday, you may hear certain monotonous sounds that leave no doubt as to the employment pursued beneath the thatched roof of the *Cappellano’s* outhouse. The sound is the sound of lessons repeated, of moral tales read aloud, often of the switching of boys’ calves, oftener of the poor pedagogue’s swearing. He knows

little enough himself, but the boys know less, and will never know more, because both teacher and pupil are sure that knowledge is quite useless, having got along, and seen others get along, very well without it thus far.

The school hours last till ten o'clock only—if he does not receive much, at least *Frà Giuseppe* gives but little—the best of the day is all in front, and the *Cappellano* makes good use of it. Besides digging trenches amidst maize and rice, training the vine, pruning the fig and the cherry tree, besides kicking the shins of refractory urchins, and having altogether a good deal to do with the boys, he has something to do with the girls too—he is the writer of village love-letters. The post is one of some importance: *Frà Giuseppe* turns another honest penny by it.

But this is scarcely a matter we speak of. The love-letters—and even other letters, would-be business letters, which *Frà Giuseppe* writes for the parish—cannot always be free from little white lies and intrigues of an innocent nature if they are to satisfy their purchasers, and in this, as in other trades, one must go heart and soul into one's affair, and always work for the most lucrative market. So it is not as *Cappellano* that *Frà Giuseppe* writes his customers' letters, but only as village *Scrivano*, and that is quite a different thing, and not a thing to be mentioned in the same breath with his priestly title. One is

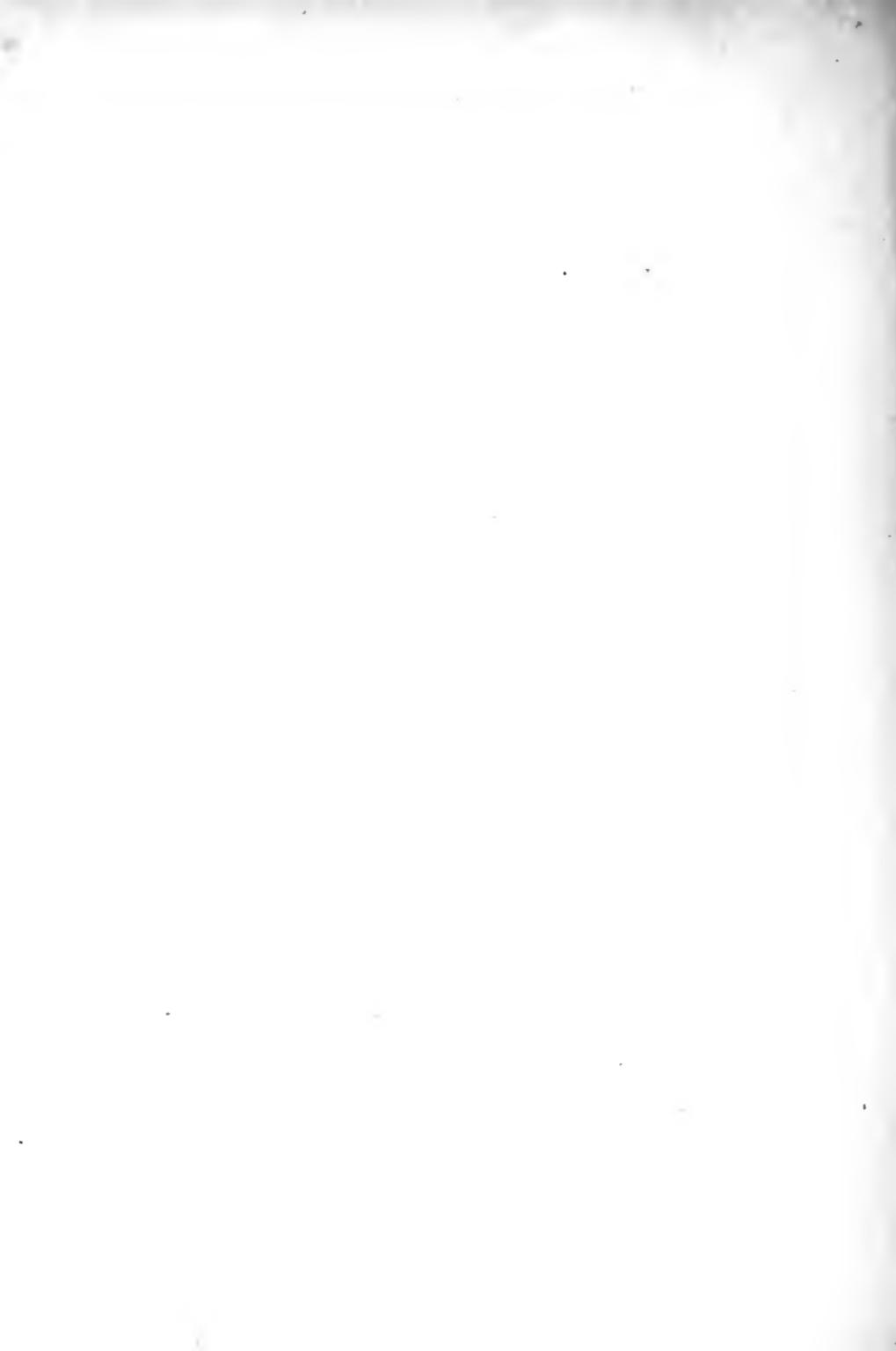
not forced to be consistent, and though, for the half-hour when he is in canonicals, the under-priest think fit—as under-priests do everywhere—to differ from his superior in matters of religious theory, though as in this case, he belong to the Ultramontane party when he wears robe and biretta, and would fain make a stir in the parish about the *Prevosto's* laxity and so forth—in fact, though the *Signor Cappellano* be a bit of a bigot in intention, both time and policy forbid him any indulgence of his opinion in practice.

'Life is short and argument is long,' says he. Were he possessed of ever so much more influence than he has in the parish he would still be a poor man, whose gourds and vines must always be a great deal more important to him than the souls of human creatures.

So, in other things beside the writing of letters, does the *Cappellano* wear two faces, and having salved conscience by the preaching of fiery doctrines within the church's walls of a Sunday and feast-day at Second Mass—he has the worldly wisdom to be nothing more outside the pulpit than that which he really is: a peasant amongst peasant neighbours. Who can afford to be a priest all day long for so poor a salary? One must needs have a little fun to one's victuals when poverty forbids better sauce, or even a priest's digestion would suffer, and the *Signor Cappellano* knows well enough fun

*Il Signor Cappellano.*





is not to be got by a strict face outside the church doors.

It is Sunday morning, and *Frà Giuseppe* has just sung mass and delivered a scathing discourse in broad Genoese dialect to the somewhat empty benches of a nine o'clock congregation. He comes out of the sacristy now, having doffed his *soutane*, to keep only the knee-breeches and stockings with steel-buckled shoes for a finish, the long black coat and three-cornered hat of etiquette. He crosses the *piazza*, which is crowded with peasants, male and female, not all of whom have been in church, except for a moment at the Elevation. A group of lads and maidens turn towards him; none of them are very respectful in manner, but *Frà Giuseppe* takes no offence. Though his person were held in ever such veneration—even as the *Prevosto's* own—though his voice be listened to with some amount of awe, as it is at the confessional, though, on holy ground, his counsels and upbraiding be sometimes regarded, none knows better than the *Cappellano* himself what a mere name is any priest's power outside of his office.

A plump, hardy-looking girl of some twenty-five years accosts him now with rough raillery. She has made a bet with some of the village swains on a matter regarding the under-priest, and at his answer the group

around burst into loudest laughter. But even this is not enough to discomfit *Frà Giuseppe*; he has seen the joke and retaliates smartly, neither fear nor prudery hindering.

Another damsel appeals to him for succour against the too forward advances of a stalwart old farmer, and something of a romp ensues. Broad jests and plain words are spoken, but though a spade be called a spade with little ado, *Frà Giuseppe* offers no reproof. His own education has not aimed at making him peculiarly sensitive to outward grossness of speech, and that is generally the worst feature about this frank and merry people. Who that is Italian, by birth and by nature, could have grown to be thus susceptible? A country priest, at all events, is not, and, as a rule, he gets on best by descending—if such a word be the fit one—to the work and the interests of the peasants about him, happy enough in his own way, and careless of any great show of respect.

Now he joins another party, and this time the group is one of old and seasoned men, whose interests are wrapped up in the crops and the coming fair. Hear him, as with avidity he discusses the country's prospects, or reconnoitres cautiously, that he may know the better how to buy and to sell with advantage on Monday next!

Here is no moonstruck priest, but a man of the world

—poor, parsimonious, and prudent. Poor, but not always stingy, not always grasping, because he, too—though pinched and careworn far more than the greater number of his people, who have their own lands and crops—he too has the proverbial *buon cuore* of the Italians.

‘Eh, Teresa,’ he calls now to an old woman whom, as he turns his steps back to the little cottage, he meets coming down the path, a basket of eggs and vegetables on her head. ‘Hast brought my portion at last? And thou hast made me wait for it!’ ‘It is too true, *Signor Cappellano*,’ replies the poor soul. ‘Your excellence must excuse. It has been a bad time, and I have not had the things to bring, though, the Virgin knows, the will to bring them!’ ‘Well, well, it signifies not. Come now to the kitchen, and you shall eat a good mouthful of *minestra* with Ninetta and myself.’

The little footpath leads down the meadow to the house with the thatched roof, where Michaelmas daisies grow to the front. There are no glass windows, there is only one chimney, the hearth is in the middle of the floor: it is just like a peasant’s hut. Ninetta has the *minestra* ready; its savoury perfume pervades the kitchen, and she stands with the great pot tipped up to pour it out, blowing away the steam from her face meanwhile. She is a merry-eyed, wrinkled old lady of considerable

years, and she is not conspicuous for a superabundance of mother-wit ; in this she differs from Caterina, who is the Prevosto's housekeeper. The poor peasant wife eats the good soup silently, while Ninetta chatters and the *Cappellano* scolds.

'Well, well, I shall get a better mess than this to-morrow, *Ninetta mia*,' says he ; 'truly no man could keep his heart alive many days on nonsense of this sort. But with the morning's sun I go to the threshing at neighbour *Pasquale's*, and thank Heaven there will be a *minestra* there that is fit to be called one, when it will be his daughter *Marrina* who has made it !'

'Oh, yes, you—you are always for praising what the pretty girls can do ! An old woman like me can never please you. I'm ashamed of you, priest as you are !'

*Frà Giuseppe* laughs contentedly. Such talk is his pleasure, spite of Ultramontane convictions. So is it also his pleasure to go to the common threshing-floor next day, where he handles his flail with the best of them, and bandies compliments with the pretty hostess as well, to quarrel afterwards—a pipe in his mouth—over bowls and *moro* with village swains.

But none the less tenderly does he doctor the hurts of the very men with whom he has quarrelled—for the *Signor Cappellano* is village physician too—none the less

patiently would he sit beside a sick bed that night, for the sun goes down on nobody's wrath—the sun that sinks behind the stately cone of Monte Baneo's hill, to leave the rich little valley lying quiet beneath a clear summer night. And walnut trees stand still upon the darkened sky, to shadow the cottage over, where *Frà Giuseppe* sleeps the placid sleep of the field-labourer.

## Sweeping the Church.

BELLS ring in the great Festa of San Giovanni Battista, and chosen girls of the village are busy with their preparations within the church, preparations both for the *funzione* and for the procession. San Giovanni Battista is the patron saint, and hence it is that his day is held in higher honour here than even in the other villages around.

It is evening, and the vigil of the feast. All the afternoon, wearisome chimes have been sounding overhead, rippling along in a joyous, careless fashion, with here and there a great echoing stroke to give them emphasis. Upon the church piazza, or even within the building itself, the noise is almost maddening, but from woods and valleys around, or, better still, from the far side of the torrent, the bell's voices have a sweet and plaintive ring that might almost lull to rest in these summer days.

Within the church four or five girls are at work. Some sweep the tessellated, marble floor of the nave, some dust the queer gaudy figures of saints and Virgins

or the vessels of the sanctuary. Others, again, are busy hanging heavy crimson damask from windows and cornice, and in this work a man must needs be found to help with hammer and steps. Two—and these are the greater and more privileged spirits—stand upon the dais of the high altar to adorn it with flaring artificial flowers ; fresh blossoms are rarely seen in a Romish church. The maidens ply their tasks merrily, not over-anxious that the work be quickly ended, for it is pleasanter than toil in the fields or at home in cottages, and they chatter noisily the while. There is none of the reverential awe in their behaviour for which Roman Catholics are usually credited.

Presently the *Signor Cappellano* comes in. He is supposed to be superintending the business, but there is field labour to attend to, the potato harvest is at hand, which the *Cappellano* can ill afford to leave in other care than his own.

‘*Orsù*,’ begins the little man sharply. ‘Haste with your business, girls, for I have much to do and little time to waste.’

‘And it is perhaps necessary that your honour remain here to spy upon us,’ retorts the foremost of the maidens, pertly ? ‘We are fairly capable of setting in order the church, and you may return to the fields.’

The little priest laughs. He knows that he is not

much beloved among the neighbours, but the speaker is a pretty girl among her set, and the *Cappellano* would



BIANCA DECORATES THE ALTAR AND SNUBS THE UNDER-PRIEST.

fain be a favourite. He walks around, making a few haphazard remarks, that are received with about as

much scorn as the feeble suggestions of an English curate who comes in among the squire's daughters in the midst of decorations. He is soon out again in the hot daylight.

'The good-for-nothing meddler!' ejaculates she fervently who has spoken before. 'It seems impossible he should not have understood by this time that I will have none of his impertinence!' and she laughs a loud laugh, in which the others join also, furtively glancing at one another and then giggling afresh.

'Say on, Bianca, and tell us a little news,' they plead. And the request is readily complied with, for Bianca is the bold and adventurous spirit of the village, and has always some tale on hand which she loves to pass on amongst the quieter of her companions. The damsel is a proud and powerful woman; she has taken her stand long since in their midst, and, before her face at all events, the rest of the flock is tacitly content to submit to her sway.

She stands now upon the altar steps as she begins her story—a fine and goodly figure. Through the soft texture of her blue homespun, likely enough her only garment, one can clearly see the curves of her large and shapely form. Her bare feet rest freely upon the cool marble; one of her bare arms, from whence sleeves are tucked away, is stretched on high to fix a garland

around the reredos, the other—curved and rounded beautifully—selects flowers from the basket at her side. Firm and graceful are the poses into which her figure is thrown as she moves and stands and stoops in the various requirements of her task. Bianca is no wondrous beauty ; she has the heavy features and the sallow complexion of her race—she is but a fair sample of our Apennine *contadina*, only a woman with dark and fervid eyes, with masses of coarse and glossy hair ; yet she has a fairness of form and a perfection of graceful strength, that we may not look to find elsewhere, as we find it at every turn amongst the North Italian peasants.

‘ Well, girls,’ says she, and her voice sounds clear above the noise of the bells, ‘ you must know that I’ve had an adventure—a fine and a merry one, too, and, what’s more, it’s the son of the *sindaco* that I have to thank for it.’

‘ Oh !’ comes an ejaculation in many tones from all the maidens.

‘ It was down at the fair of Presoli. I went to sell and to buy for the mother, and as I was bargaining over a handkerchief—and I must have been red with excitement, too—he comes up behind me, and I hear him laughing with right good-will at my tussle with the old *pedona*. “ Ha, ha ! my pretty girl,” says he, “ and I will give you the handkerchief.” “ A thousand thanks, Signor

Beppo," I answer, and then we discourse a little, and when I have sold the little white heifer and bought the sieves and the rolling-pin for the mother, "It is nearly evening," says he, "and at dusk the dance is to begin. Thou wilt surely come and step one measure with me." I stay for the dance, I give no thought to the scolding which the mother will, perhaps, give me—for she expected me home for the supper, you must know—but I just enjoy myself to the full. Then the Signor Beppo gives me to eat and to drink, good wine of Monferrato, and he conducts me home in the later evening—it must have been upon ten o'clock.'

"Oh, what fun!" exclaim all the girls. "But didst thou not fear the mother?"

"*Che!*" the girl ejaculates, shrugging her shoulders. "I invented a little white lie for her. I told her there had come a rich *signore*, and wanted to buy the heifer for a good price, but then, that he went away, having said he would come back for her; that I waited, though tired and weary I was, until dusk of evening, and when he never came, that I sold to another man. Oh, the mother praised me for a thrifty girl! You think I am so stupid that I can't even find a lie when I want it!"

The girls laugh. "Oh, no," says one, "and the white lies which one needs not to tell in confession are so fair and convenient."

'But say on, Bianca,' calls out another. 'The handkerchief that he gave thee—thou hast it?'

'Surely. It is a ravishing handkerchief. He would have given me a brooch of gold, but that I would not.'

'Oh, pity!' says a sympathetic maid.

'Pity!' retorts Bianca. 'Thou little fool! And what excuse should I have given for the trinket? The kerchief the mother knew well I meant to buy for myself, but gold gives no man to a girl but he who will marry her, and where was then my suitor to show? No, Bianca has got no gourd's head on her shoulders! She knows her business! Also did he get his box on the ear before I had done with him, the fine young man,' laughs she!

'How was that? tell us,' come the voices in chorus. But Bianca has said as much as she means to say, and no entreaties can extract more news from her.

'I've told you the story for fun,' says she, 'and as to how I played my cards and why I spoke my mind as I did, that's no concern of yours. And what's more, girls, when your day comes, I don't doubt you'll know how to manage your game just as well as I did without any advice of mine,' puts in this wary daughter of Eve. 'All I say is, have your fun, and mind you don't pay the bill.'

And Bianca is right, for again she is but a fair specimen of her class. The girls of North Italy are by

no means so weak and impressionable as their free and fiery natures have led it to be surmised. Fun and frolic they love well enough, it is true ; neither do they fear to run a risk of misunderstanding, sometimes, for the sake of a little glory and a brave adventure. But the girl who has not been dexterous with her weapons and bold in her dignity is for ever scorned amongst her neighbours and her comrades.

Therefore it is that our girls can freely go their way.

## The Village Sempstress.

WHEN the road leaves the church to steer for the valley's narrower end and to follow the river's course, it leads, before half a mile is gone, into the midst of a little hamlet that is one of San Matteo's prettiest parasites. And there stands a cottage that has always been a marked feature in the neighbourhood. It is the house of Marrina, the village sempstress.

When the day's heat has abated, and the shadows begin to deepen, and the breezes to blow more freshly, let us, with the villagers, gather round one of the village's greatest characters.

She is an old maid. An old maid with plenty of ditties, like most of her kind, ditties about the youthful days when Paolo proposed, and nothing but prudence induced her to send poor Giovanni about his business —he who was such a handsome young fellow, too, and had such a flourishing *pasta* business! But in spite of them all, Marrina is still single, though she is past fifty, and is of so portly a figure as to excuse any man for thinking twice about the necessary allowance of

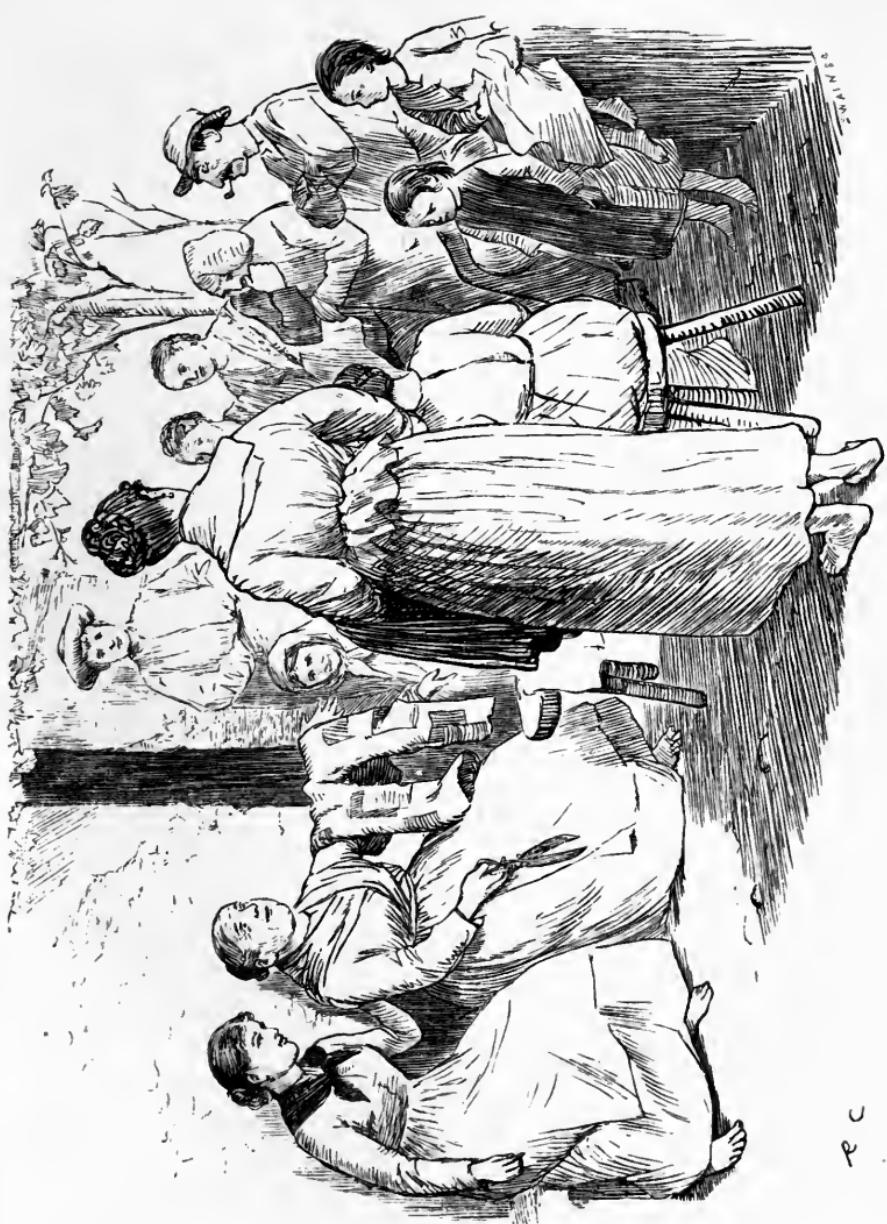
*polenta* and beans. If you ask her, she will praise the Virgin to your face, who has kept her a virgin in peace and contentment until this age, and will assure you that, though Giovanni and Paolo were dying of love, nothing should persuade her to change her determination. Has she not nephews and nieces of all sizes, sexes, natures, and ages to cheer her loneliness? Does she not nourish towards all the men whose coats she fashions, and whose breeches she mends, a love far greater and more philanthropic than any she could have borne to one poor single husband?

It must surely be under no protest that Marrina is happy. Watch her broad, beaming face as she turns it round on the bystanders; listen to her good-humoured jests! She is no soured woman, though she has been lame from childhood, and has probably never been wooed as she pretends. She is proud of her position—the position which gowns and petticoats, corduroys and jackets, have won for her. With heavy figure, scantily clad in red and purple *bordato*—the homespun linen of the district—a bright yellow kerchief folded across her ample bosom, and her few grey locks neatly braided and packed into a lump behind her head, she sits on the stone bench beneath her cottage porch, two stockingless feet propped on an opposite

stool, while she clips rashly with great scissors, sewing, settling, and jabbering jocosely the while.

A knot of peasants has gathered round ; Marrina's porch is almost as common a meeting-ground as the church piazza on *festas* or the well at sunset. If there is any news rife anywhere, it is to be heard from the sempstress sooner than from anyone else ; if there is any advice wanted, she is the one whose advice is asked at least, if rarely taken. A more sympathetic person could not be with whom to gossip over all matters of personal interest, with whom to weigh the pros and cons in all affairs of female indecision, and perhaps the taking of advice rarely includes much that is more definite. Besides the family circle—that children of brothers and of sisters, boys and girls of all ages, have swelled to goodly proportions around her—many inhabitants, not only of this hamlet, but of others in the parish, have met together to-night. Some have brought their own supper from home to eat, standing or lounging on steps and wall, others content themselves only with taking their evening rest. Amongst the men, many do not even talk ; Marrina and her crew do it for them.

'I never knew a man like you, Gian-Battista, for wearing out the knees of your breeches ! I've patched this pair for you three or four times !' (And this may clearly be discerned, for stuffs of more than one colour



The Village Sempstress.



and texture have been used to help out the poor brown fustian.) ‘If you had a wife, and were not a blessed unencumbered mortal as I am, she would have told you long ago it wasn’t worth paying two *soldi* every fortnight to get these things seen to! But I must earn my money, though I shan’t have the face to ask you for the coppers this time! Look there, here’s Bianca! She’s been to Ponte Decimo and some new stuff she’ll have brought to show me! I’m sick of these girls’ vanity! When I was a girl we took what our aunts and mothers gave us, without being so bold as to choose for ourselves. Eh, well, come on, child! What if I do talk? We’ve all been young once. Hand over the things.’

And the old face is as eager as any of the young ones over the merits of pure wool *versus* cheaper mixed wares. ‘Give over thy silk apron, for the love of the Holy Mother, girl, and just buy a good thing while you’re about it! Who cares whether you’ve a silk apron or a decent stuff one? New-fangled notions from the towns! I’ve no patience with you all! As long as you’ve a good dress, a clean veil, and a little gold on, not the Lord himself but must needs be content with your looks!’

‘Don’t you think it’s too bright?’ objects the anxious and undecided purchaser. ‘They do say that in Genoa one wears nothing but dark colours.’

'You go away with you !' retorts the old woman angrily. 'Why, when you can't *get* a colour now if you want it ! When I was young that pedlar that you've heard me speak of—who used to look two ways out of his eyes, you know—why, I've known him bring round stuffs with colours in them that shamed the very Creator of the world ! Now, hasn't the Virgin that they carry round in procession got fine colours on ? You don't suppose the holy *Madonna* doesn't know what's to be worn ! Go to !'

And Marrina flings her big shears recklessly into some yards of calico, out of which there issues speedily the roughest pattern of a man's shirt.

'You've woven good linen this year, mother Teresa. I'll buy twenty *palmi* of it to make my Virginia some sheets against her marriage. The girl must have them, and, if her mother won't give them her, I suppose her aunt must ! And you,' turning to the former girl, 'not content with a stuff like that for a mere *festa* dress, when my poor Tonietta has got nothing but a calico frock to have her First Communion ! Why, I'd almost believe the wool was English, and they make no bad goods there, for they're so rich they don't need to.'

And Marrina takes the coveted stuff in her hands, crushing it to test its genuineness, and regarding it with the eye of a true connoisseur. Then, carefully refolding

it, she gives back the packet without another word, and returns to her work.

The sky has become overcast. Banks and boulders of heavy cloud rest on the hills of Savignone down the valley. The mountains have caught the gloom, and look so dark that the ruined castle upon Monte Pilato's side scarcely shows from off its background. A storm has been prophesied all day, because the air was so sultry ; and now the walnuts overhead rustle ominously, and even the chestnuts far away seem to sway as though before a coming strength. Large drops of rain begin to fall.

‘Holy Madonna, and the tempest must come now when we want to keep the wheat upright !’

Marrina takes her huge person hastily away, limping over the stones, and calling with shrill voice to one niece to see to the linen, to the other to drive in the cows.

‘Ah, it’s become a strange parish since the days when I was a girl,’ she mutters. ‘Not a bell ringing yet for the Lord’s mercy against the storm, and it’s upon us, with the corn standing half a yard high, and the maize too !’

Most of the neighbours have disappeared to see after their property, but to the remaining Marrina addresses her complaint.

'Why, when I was fifteen there wasn't a stranger in the village—not even other country folk, let alone town folk! And now, because our valleys grow things better than theirs do, they must come and spoil our luck! It's the strangers do it all. Not but that I admire the fine pink house over the river that Signor Mendicano built, as well as the blue front to the miller's new cottage, but I say it's the strangers spoil everything!'

'You can't have it both ways, dear heart,' remarks a young man from beneath.

'That's all very well for you, Giannino. The strangers do you a great deal of good, I suppose, when they persuade you to play bowls all day and waste your time! When your land has gone to rack and ruin, and the disease has killed all your vines from want of a little care, they can set it all to-rights, I suppose, by just talking you over to go to America! It's no fortune you'll make there, but the fortune of pride and conceit, though you'll have left your native land for it, and the girl who loves you well! But the young are all alike nowadays—no fear in them, and no fitting shame of things they know nothing about! And, to be sure, it's not much there is in the girls of to-day that would keep a man to them! Yes, they'll be all off to get their fortunes too, as if the poverty that did for their parents couldn't do for them!'

'Ah, the bells *have* begun to ring at last,' she puts in as the clashing chime breaks in on her speech.

'It's all the foreigners from the towns!' she goes on again glibly. 'Now, I remember when I first used to go and mend canonicals in the sacristy for the *Prevosto*! It was as fearful he was of these *Signori* as I am. They'll ruin the village, Marrina, he said. And now doesn't he go and eat their very *minestra*—I should even dare to say broth that's made with meat on a Saturday, if it weren't I'd be afraid for my soul at saying such a thing of the Lord's priest! And no more delight does he take in walking under the canopy at procession than—*Dio!* And there he is with the lady of the Signor Perrino! And a real woollen dress she has on, with this rain down on us! Why it's a sin!'

Marrina quickly swings herself down the broken steps of her abode, and hastens towards the advancing couple.

'Fetch a chair for her under the *pergola*; why it's no education you young men have nowadays,' she whispered angrily to Giannino.

The rain has come up the valley in a great mist; it has broken over the fields and the woods in a torrent that quickly saturates the ground; it drops again from the broad-leaved chestnuts. It is scarcely a wholesome rain, though the land was parched, for the hail descends

and a violent storm might heavily damage the growing things of the country.

The *Prevosto* seeks Marrina's sympathy in this evil chance, but all her complaints have quickly given place to pleasure in the very presence of the townwoman with the real woollen dress on of a working-day. She is only a tradesman's wife, but she has bits of news from the city and a figured silk jacket to display, and Marrina warms so that she is really mortified at the refusal of beans and *polenta*, which refreshment was offered at once with the gracious hospitality that comes as naturally to these courteous peasants as the passing benediction or chance greeting by the roadside.

But at last the storm is over, the air is fresh, the soil is fragrant after the rain. The *Prevosto* goes on his way towards the sick person, whom he has to visit. The tradesman's wife, after an exciting gossip, returns to the pink house in the meadows. Marrina lays aside her needle, for the night has darkened, and work cannot be done by firelight. 'She's a good soul, and it was a beautiful stuff' she murmurs sitting by the hearth. 'But I say let everyone keep to what he's been brought up in. And as for the strange folk and the going to America, I say, God forbid !'

## The Village Damsel.

FOR a time holidays are over. Until the festival of the Madonna is due, after the dog days, there is no rigorous necessity for laziness. San Giovanni is past, and the most particular feasts of the early summer. Work is again the order of the day, with only the less important interval of Sunday to make a little breathing space—breathing space that will scarcely seem necessary from such pleasurable labour, perhaps, for all the peasants of the Northern Apennines think it indispensable even though they cannot be so fitly accused as the Southern Italians of that love of the *dolce far niente* which has come to be considered, sometimes most unjustly, such a good description of their existence.

To-day is a *giorno feriale*, a working-day proper : let us judge for ourselves of the aptness of the proverbial reproof.

Standing on the church steps, as we stood on the day of the Corpus Domini, with the peasants—men and women—gathered in knots on the piazza, and the priest in their midst, you might see straight before you a road

running right away amongst the meadows to the river's bank, while to left of you another way winds itself above the water ; and behind, a third, more rugged than ever, climbs the mountain's side to a hamlet on the mountain's brow. Take either of those three paths, and you cannot miss coming shortly into the midst of some steady labour.

Down towards the river's shingle girls are driving cows to their evening drink, women are spreading yellow linen to bleach in the sunshine and moistening it with water that they dash up from the stream with their wooden scoops, or perhaps rolling it into bales before carrying it home. Below them the torrent's bed widens out in the broader expanse of the valley, with plantations of willow trees guarding its way on the stones, and coronella shrubs bending over from the rocks; above them the water's line dwindle<sup>s</sup> away to a mere thread as it nears the mountains where it has had its birth. With the heavy homespun in coils on their heads and shoulders, or neatly folded away in baskets which they swing between them, the *contadine* climb up to the meadow's level, and so home to thatched cottages where walnuts grow in the fields, to lonelier cottages that stand in strong breezes on the ridge of the hill-side : home to fractious children, famished husbands, sons and brothers —the linen, the dinner, and the supper, have been their day's work.

And on the broader way that leads to a larger neighbouring village, there have been also wayfarers. The little town that lies some three miles off down the river's course holds a few things which cannot be procured in the village. It boasts a fair now and then, whence the head of a household brings back a calf or a heifer perhaps, and even on common days the town has a few shops that can produce articles of homely furniture, or even of bright peasant dress.

Nettina has been there this very afternoon. She is coming home as cooler shadows lengthen over the meadows and furrow the hills : she has a new wooden *conca* on her head—the old timeworn copper one has been soldered so often, and yet always wears through and lets the water leak ! In her hand she carries shoes which clash against a red earthen pot that is one of her purchases, and her large, shapely feet rise up and down off the sharp stones as fearlessly as though her way were across the cool turf of the meadow. Nettina is considered a handsome girl. She has keen dark eyes, a well-cut face, a brown skin, and black glossy hair that ripples gladly down beside her face and behind her ears, its plaits fitting round tightly into the head's hollow above the nape of the neck ; her teeth stand in beautifully even rows, large and white, and ready to be shown upon the slightest provocation to a smile. She

walks well: though she must have been walking all day, she walks well, and is not tired. Her head is erect—the wooden bowl, poised on the cushion of her own knotted kerchief, only sways with the motion of her own gait. Her square shoulders scarcely give at all to the swing of her quick step, but the limbs move freely, and the body sways easily on the hips, upon one of which she holds a hand, as though to steady her step.

The last corner of the road has been doubled, and the well-known church spire with its blue painted belfry is in sight. Here the path from *La Madonna della Vittoria* strikes the main road. A man descends it now. He should be a young man from the strength and speed of his step, but his face, and even the top part of his figure, is not visible, while his gait is of necessity stooping, for on his shoulders he bears an enormous load of hay packed into an enormous wicker pannier of coarsest network, through the holes of which long grasses press out to hang in a fringe around him. Nettina, however, seems to know, in spite of travesty, whether he be a young man or not.

'A happy night to you, Beppino,' she calls out, but without stopping her way.

'And is it you, Nettina, of the walnut-grove? What, again to Ponte Novo? How many days in the week do you go to Ponte Novo?'

'You're an ill-educated man to speak so! But I pay no heed to you. Why should I wish, suppose you, to go to Ponte Novo? But a woman has duties which you men only remember when she forgets them!'

'You say well—you say well! All the same the miller's son who lives at Ponte Novo is better than the poor devils who grow the *gran turco* up in the valley! Eh, I should like to see what you look like now?'

'But you can't! And it's like your impudence to think I should look anything for you to see! I shall have no shame to tell you, when I go to say the "Yes" in church, *that* you may count upon! So I will give you the holy night.'

And with this greeting Nettina hurries on. She has the water to fetch, and the supper to see to. She has no time for further parley. Only, as she walks, her white teeth are the better to be seen, as she thinks over the little conversation.

The sun has set. The sky is deeper and further than ever, for it is more transparent now that there is only a remembrance of the rosy glow. The solid hills meet the air that seems almost solid, too, so far away; their outlines lie peacefully upon the sky, soft browns and greens of pastures contrasting with the harsher character of rocks, and again with the softest quality of clouds. Just opposite, Monte Pilato breaks from out the

quiet line of the horizon to strike up a great mass into the air, and at the foot of the valley Monte Cranio makes a mitre with its two sharp peaks, in whose clefts one can see the chestnut trees' outline even from this distance.

The woods cluster so richly over the country that there scarcely seems room for the waving wheat to grow, for the large-leaved maize, nor the tall grass of the meadows. Below the road, some hundred feet, the river is creeping lazily, but now the rush of water over the weir warns Nettina that she is close at home, and must leave the river's bank and climb a steep bit of path to reach her cottage on the hill's ridge. Yet her figure scarcely stoops, nor her pace slackens, though the way is hard. To her right a little gorge cleaves the land, in which gurgles a half-parched rill, and Nettina's lungs have strength, even as she climbs, for a merry shout to the labourer who works on the opposite side.

Now she has gained the more level road above. On her right hand, thick chestnut woods clothe a hill-side that slopes up toward the horizon; but on her left, fields, and vineyards, and meadows lie in fertile terraces one below the other, until they reach the valley's depth where the stream, shallow sometimes and calm, then tossed and wayward, flows onward to the larger river. Chestnut woods again are upon the further slope. They

grow and flourish everywhere — tall and sweeping where the ground is richest, but finding room even upon those narrowest ledges of earth for which the rock makes a little place. The woods are not very dense, nor the trees noble and stately, as in English parks and forests, but the trunks are old, and hollow sometimes, or gnarled again and sinuous and sweetly scented ; the branches are curved, and graceful with a strange and pertinacious grace ; large and full-veined leaves fan kindly in the breeze. Who would seek fairer and pleasanter woods wherein to pass summer days ?

Now thatched and sloping roofs and whitewashed walls of cottages peep out from between the trees, and the damsel knows that she will soon be home. For there is the village which lies opposite to her own across the gorge, and little lights are already beginning to flicker from its open doors and windows. Not lamp-lights, or even rushlights ; in the July days, at least, no light is needed after daylight is gone but the light of dying embers or of newly kindled sticks upon the hearth. These that she sees are the flames of the wood fires just lit for supper. And Nettina hastens forward with quicker step. There is a cool wind creeping softly about, and even the noise of the rushing water below seems to freshen the air. She has entered the hamlet. Walking upon the soft dead leaves which have been

strewn over the stony way, and running up the few broken steps beneath the little *pergola*, she turns in at the cottage door.

The mother is on her knees, blowing from her sound lungs upon the struggling fire, whence the white wood smoke ascends freely. The kitchen is an odd and dingy little place, with its solitary window and blackened ceiling, where slender rafters are set widely apart, that the chestnuts, strewn over the floor above, may be dried during winter by the heat from beneath. There is no glass, moreover, to the window, but only heavy little wooden shutters ; but these are not often closed, and the free air blows in by night and by day, bearing the sweet scent of carnations, that stand in a broken pot on the sill. There is no door leading into the sleeping-room—only an aperture in the wall. The pot hangs over the fire by means of a heavy chain from the centre beam. For the hearth is in the middle of the room in these Italian cottages, raised a few inches above the rest of the floor.

Rough benches stand around it, and these, with a table and a dresser at the further end, where paste is rolled out for the *maccaroni*, are all of dark walnut wood. The room is the dwelling-room as well as the kitchen—this do many little signs of rough comfort and homeliness abundantly testify. Red earthenware platters

are ranged on a shelf, and several curious water-vessels, of earthenware, or metal, stand about, giving colour and quaintness to the room. On a low wooden stool without the doorstep sits a little maiden of some eight or ten years, dark and richly brown, like the greater part of Italian children ; she shells beans into a platter of quaint yellow ware, and beside her, upon the low wall of the little terrace, sits another child—older by a year or two, who carries a tiny, swaddled mummy in her arms. She is no doubt the daughter of some neighbour, and is sitting here with her little charge, that she may, at least, not be scolded by the mother and worried by more babies at home.

‘Hie thee to the well, Nettina,’ says the elder woman, almost without looking up from her task, as she sees her daughter stand within the kitchen. ‘Thou hast been long at the fair. But patience ! I will kindle these two sticks while thou art gone, and then we put on the *polenta*. Haste thee.’

The girl has already twisted her kerchief into a firm little cushion upon which to rest the water-vessel on her head. Then she takes the great copper *conca* and sallies forth.

The village fountain lies hard by, and at this evening hour it is thronged with women, young and old, in quest of their nightly supply. A great chat-

tering may be heard ; the well is a trysting-place for young men and maidens, and a place of gossip for the old women : it is noisy. Nettina has ever been a favourite ; proud though she be, she is fond and gentle, so that, peasant girl as she is, she has more tact and courtesy than many a high-bred lady. The girls wel-



NETTINA RETURNING FROM THE WELL.

come her loudly, and would fain detain her awhile for the usual exchange of confidences, but she is firm to-night in her resolve not to loiter, and only laughs at the importunate questions of companions, all eager to know if that rumour be true about the new gallant. The *conca* is filled in a few minutes, and then lifted to its

place on her head ; lifted, not painfully nor clumsily, but with a movement full of that grace for which these strong and hardy girls are so specially remarkable. Watch her now as she descends the steep and stony path upon the village. Her figure—strong and beautifully measured—sways gently upon its hips, her knees are straightened slightly, and her toes are pointed that she may the better feel her way as she comes down the hill. The way is rough, and the stones roll from under her, neither dare she look to her steps by reason of the burthen on her head ; yet her bare feet tread none the less firmly, nor fear to cling to the rocks. The brown column of her throat grows erect to support a shapely head from out curved and goodly shoulders, and, beneath a soft silken kerchief which she wears loosely across the top part of her figure, the breasts swell tenderly. One arm rests curved on her hip, as though to steady her gait ; and, even through a sleeve of soft, stout stuff, the firm moulding of the flesh can be distinctly traced. The other arm hangs at her side, and seems to emphasize the graceful motion of her limbs.

The *polenta* is boiling in the great pot, the beans are shelled, and the neighbour's baby has been carried away to be unswathed and swathed again, when Tonietta, playing now in the road, shrieks out in her piping treble to say that the *signori* of the *villa* are about to come by

on their evening walk. Nettina steps out upon the terrace, the wooden staff in her hand with which she has been stirring the pot, and even the mother is no less curious to have a peep at the blue muslin dresses, and starched frills, and elaborate-dressed hair of the gentry. They pick their way over the dirty ground with dainty shoes, no wise fitted for mountain wear. The ladies belong to a fine family of *negozianti*, who have rented the doctor's house in the larger village. They are grand now, and glad to be stared at, for it is the eve of a great *festa*, otherwise might they be seen in the mornings, around their lodging, in attire far more slatternly than Nettina's at the present moment.

'*Orsù*,' whispers the elder woman loudly to her daughter, 'haste thee, and dish up the *polenta*. The *signori* will eat with us to-night, who knows?'

But ere the meal is served and ready, the fine ladies have gone 'their way, mobbed and gazed at by many children, commented upon by many voices of the more learned ones.

Further down the village, families are already at supper, eating their *minestra* from off wooden platters, while they lounge in the cool upon steps and balconies of rough stone.

'A happy evening, pretty ladies! Come and eat a mouthful with us.' Such are the courteous invitations

poured out from all sides upon the passers-by. Hospitable-natured, for all their rough simplicity and their poverty, these good peasants are gracious and gentle-mannered, with never a thought of false shame. What they offer is of their best, and the gift needs no apology. Frank and primitive people, with winning and cheery ways, are these. Often have I rested with them beneath vine-trelisséd *pergole*, eating of their savoury food, or have sat upon a wooden bench, when youths and maidens gathered round the hearth on autumn evenings to toss and roast the chestnuts, and always have I been cared for as an honoured guest, while yet the merriment and the plain-speaking went on alike, nor did irksomeness creep in amongst them because of the presence of one guest who was not of their own caste.

But the twilight is fast deepening into night. The *signore* have doffed their holiday clothes, doubtless, and are eating their supper by this time. Within the cottage there is scarce time to display the goods bought at the fair, scarce a moment wherein to question and marvel at the *centesimi* which were deducted from each bargain, before the men are all there, clamouring for the supper that is so late to-night, and laughing at the yellow kerchiefs and tapes and buttons displayed to view on the kitchen dresser. All the purchases are quickly cleared away for very shame! Nettina lifts the flat baskets with-

in doors, in which maize has been drying all day in the sun, and gathers up the golden cones that were hanging on cords along the cottage's front ; that other gold of the gourd-flowers, where they trail on the ground, changed to green an hour ago, when they shut their petals with the sunset.

Men and women close round the hearth, for supper is ready at last. 'The minestra is good to-night,' some one remarks ; 'the *fagioli* are boiled to a savoury pulp, the *tagliarini* are finely cut.' Darkness has fallen ; nine o'clock strikes. 'Good-night, neighbours ; I am weary,' says Nettina. 'Good-night.'

## The Village Swain.

ASK Nettina what she thinks of him : pretty, proud Nettina, who can tread so stately a measure at the village *fête*, and can throw so scornful a glance at the man who has been too frivolous for her well-ordered mind ! Well, maybe she is a bad one to choose for a fair opinion, for whether he please her or no she will toss her head, and answer you only with a gruff '*Cosa me ne fasso?*' which, being interpreted from our dialect, means, What is he to me ? So, better than that, ask our village pet, our dear little cosy, most comfortable, and convenient of flirts—Bianca del Prato ; she will tell you truth ! Yes ; though with her lips—curling, smiling, rosy lips—she only simper, 'he is not amiss,' yet does not the creeping crimson colour say as clearly as any words, and would not the two brown eyes say so too, if only they were not cast down, 'The village swain ? He is charming ; he is beautiful ! Life would be nothing without him ! And the red kerchief that I wore at the fair is lovely only because he told me my lips could shame the colour even of *that*.' And yet he is not Bianca's betrothed. Prepare

to be shocked, oh righteous damsels! He is only one of the village swains—only ‘a young man like every other’—only a youth whose name and whose voice she knows well, the fire of whose banter she has stood bravely, the glance of whose eyes she has blushed beneath, nothing more. But where would be the use of the summer sun, thinks Bianca, if one might only look pretty for one’s own *gallante*!

There are three village beauties—you have seen them all. There are *four* village beaux—of the very first water! So much the better for the girls, *they* think! Pietro Mazzacane shall serve us for a type.

If, from the church, you take the straight road that has led you before to the home of Marrina, the sempstress, and if, instead of following your shadow, you turn to its right, and cross the river upon those odd old stepping-stones, if you do this of an evening after work hours, and climb the opposite hill till you reach the hamlet in front of you, maybe you may find Pietro smoking a clay pipe on the doorstep, whilst he devours a goodly bowl of the home *minestra*. He is a tall man, not heavily built, not even very broad-shouldered; as he lounges, one leg bent, one arm upraised behind his head, consolation’s emblem in clay between his lips, as he appears now, propping his manly form against the grey stone of the cottage wall, you might scarcely believe him to be strong

or even a good labourer. His crisp black hair vies with the tendrils of his own vines in curly, wayward beauty; his dark, deep eyes tell of fire that can swiftly be roused, of love tales that can sweetly be told; his lips are ruddy, his limbs have the subtle shape which should be theirs. All this you will allow: even of his yellow skin you will graciously say ‘it harmonises with the rest.’ But still you doubt that that man can ever labour with the stern strength that labour demands: he does not look like it. And you are right. Put him to till *your* ground, to dig *your* trenches, to plant *your* potatoes, and his long lazy limbs will achieve not a whit more than you gave them credit for, though his clay pipe will work busier than ever, and his siestas be the more frequent as also his merry jokes and his friendly conversations.

But do not judge our Pietro’s powers from *your* trenches. Get up some day, when the steaming land bids men know how brazen will be the mid-day’s heat—get up when Pietro, when Nettina, and when Bianca get up: at three o’clock in the morning. The sky is grey. Perhaps there is not a cloud, and yet it is grey with a solemn greyness, and one would scarcely dare to hope for the rosy young light that will steal over it before long to flush it slowly into warm and fulsome life.

The mountains seem very near; their peaks and cones look very tall as they stand out of the morning mists that

creep around their girth and wind themselves away into the hollows of the hills. Perhaps you find it almost cold. So does not Pietro. Only the sack in which he is to carry down a load from the mountain is wound round his shoulders above his linen shirt, but the keen exercise stands in place of covering, for an hour's hearty lung-labour has brought him out upon the cone of Monte Marzo, some five hundred feet above the placid valley of his home. Bianca has driven the cows to pasture upon the slopes just below, but the village swain has only time for one shout in far-off greeting now; it is his *own* business that he is about, and his own corn must not rot, nor his own land lie fallow for want of a good day's swing of the pickaxe. What say you now? Are not his muscles tough, and is that arm not mighty that hurls the *zappa* above his head and brings it down again into the stiff clay to dig up his field?

Look around you off this mountain-top. Behind you lies Monte Stella, before you the range of the Polcevera hills, to your right Antola with her great stretching shoulder and heavy-browed summit; below you are valleys, where meadows lie and waters flow and fall and trickle; and everywhere on high hills and descending slopes there is cultivation. It is no lazy race of men that has notched those mountain-sides with terraces the better to train the vines towards the sun,

that has planted them with corn and maize, with peas and beans and potatoes, with fruit trees of every kind, that has trained the gourds and the vines, that has utilised every strip and corner of land upon the steeps, that has quarried the stone, and fed and tended the silk-worms. '*Per Bacco*, the Lord Himself could do no more,' Pietro would tell you as he shoulders his huge pickaxe and, beneath the chestnut wood hard by, gathers and crowds into his sack no mean load of the first fallen leaves to strew beneath the cattle in cattle-sheds. One does not go down the mountain empty-handed, even after a hard day's work, and no one could say that Pietro does not show to advantage running down the steep with faggots on his shoulders and over his head—running to keep his balance on the rough and rapid incline. Though Bianca would laugh if you found anything to admire in him at such a moment! 'A young man not amiss, I grant you, but with a load of *foglia* on his head—*Dio*, what a taste!'

No, Bianca likes him better on the days when, he being somebody else's brother working with her own father, she can go with 'somebody else' to take the meal to them at midday; better still on the days when he is threshing with all the neighbours on her father's threshing-floor, and comes to eat a *cena* of her own preparing in her own home; best of all, when there is

a fair at Ponte Novo or Bossola, and she, who is going to buy *conche*, can walk by his side, who is going to buy cattle.

Yes, those are fine days! One goes to see a friend the evening before, and gets one's hair plaited in a beautiful *resca di pesce* for the morrow's adventure. [It does not get tossed as you might fancy; the sleep of the just is sweet and sound.] Then to rise with the daybreak, to don one's best *bordato* dress, to fold one's yellow kerchief, and tie one's heavy shoes, that all 'goes without saying' for a girl. That would be done for mere pride's sake, whether one's *gallante* lives in Genoa, as Bianca's does, or no.

And is it not the merest chance that Pietro, sauntering up the hill with two or three other young fellows abreast, all of them with hands in their pockets, and pipes in their mouths, and carnation in their soft felt hats, is it not the funniest thing that Pietro should just meet '*Bianca bella*' upon the bend of the rising ground, where the town first comes to sight, and just have been making a joke about her to Giovanni, too? Well, well, at all events, Pietro has a very bright red scarf to gird up his loins, and a very specially handsome carnation, and quite a remarkable blue cravat, besides wearing his hat a little more to one side than the rest. He looks quite as well as if he had been dressed in Genoa; one

cannot be expected not to see that, though one has a lover in the town!.. And Pietro knows that Bianca *has* seen it, and is as pleased as he need be.



THE VILLAGE SWAIN AT A BARGAIN.

Surely no man ever had his way with the girls better than Pietro! Though Bianca picks up a friend at Cerisola, and there is a great deal of talk about woollen

stuffs, our swain still fancies even the female rubbish is trimmed and fitted to his special ear. Oh, blessed and invariable male content! A pretty girl in front who cannot fail to admire the best-looking man about, a glass of sour *monferrato* at the first village, and a pipe in your mouth—Paradise can offer nothing better! Excepting a good bargain, and for the better chance of that, all those other three good things are abandoned when once our Pietro gets into the thick of the cattle market. That poor pale little brindled heifer means success or failure, perhaps for the whole year, to our modest land and farm-owner. No wonder that knuckles come down bravely on the little three-legged table of the *osteria* where Pietro sits face to face over wine with the seller; no wonder that oaths are frequent, and words run high! Is it not a question of two whole francs? Nevertheless, they split the difference, and make up the quarrel till it needs must be opened afresh over the game of bowls, whither buyers and sellers soon carry every grievance.

As Pietro stands swinging his arm for the fling—handling the bowl or stooping for his aim, as he saunters about among the company or drinks his glass at the open-air bar—in all or each of these poses he is an object of admiration to many even more than to Bianca del Prato, who has seen him grow tall ever since the

day, ten years ago, when he switched the cherry-bough back into her face! An object of admiration, and, though he is a simple-hearted fellow enough, to none more than to himself. Is he not young and healthy—what better can he do? And no doubt he is right! Though Bobbio can perhaps produce better and Cerisola several as good, our Pietro is a good enough example of his kind. He is not very religious; he will laugh at the priests to their face when they pass in procession, and make fun of their Latin, but he will bend his knee and doff his hat and wedge his person just within the church-door at benediction time, or when the bell sounds at the elevation, as a good Catholic should: what man of sense does more? And at a bargain he will hold his own to the last, and come off triumphant if it be only to one *centesimo*; what better praise can one give to a man's honesty? Surely, Pietro Mazzacane is as good as you could wish for a village swain!

### The Love-letter.

THERE are three of the village girls who are prettier than its other girls. One of them is red-haired and buxom, with pink cheeks and white arms—she is the most admired by townsfolk: village folk have another taste. Nettina, from the walnut-grove, carries the palm with them—she has a figure that is grand in its every line, and when she dances on the green on a *festa* night, she does not bound and frolic with uncurbed merriment, but moves stately through the ring, and has no mind for any foolish jest with men that are from the cities. Nettina is a very proud and modest maid—she cares for no new fashions of dress, she is thrifty and patient, and when she walks up the steep from the church to her father's cottage she can bear the floursacks on her shoulders or the dry leaf on her head without show of weariness or stain. ‘What a fine chip of a woman,’ say the village suitors! But Nettina looks neither to right nor to left till a fitting offer be made and a trusty mediator ready to negotiate—so—to meet coming down the mountain or at the well of an evening or upon

the piazza at Ave Maria and at the fair—Bianca even before Nettina is the pet of our village. She is grey-eyed and smooth-tongued, with long hair and lithe figure, not proud nor hasty, but good-tempered and merry, with ready jest, when the evening's 'chaff' has hit the hardest. Moreover, she can deftly spin the distaff and weave linen on the hand-loom: Bianca is San Matteo's second belle.

The daylight is gone, but the clearness of the summer's night is as good as the sun. Supper has been cooked and eaten at home; the hearth is swept, and though the Angelus has finished sounding awhile ago, and resting-time is near, our Bianca sallies out into the white evening to do a commission that has been on her mind all day. The Signor Cappellano shall earn four *soldi* to-night, and who knows if he shall not earn some more on the day of the wedding, for Pietro Gambari is rich, and every priest shall have his due. Already she begins to dream of that pretty day in the mellow autumn, and of the silk dress, which surely such a promising lover will not fail to bestow for the marriage, even besides the gold which it is her right to expect! And so many *confetti* for the children! Bianca is rash. She is going to negotiate a little for herself, without the help, as yet, of the inevitable mediator. But only a little, to the extent of answering a love-letter! If the

suitor be true and worthy, he will find the mediator to send to her father's house.

There is an early moon. It hangs in the clear sky just above the church spire, and floods the *piazzetta* with grey light. The leaves of the walnut tree near by shiver gently, and the black cypresses in the burying-ground look very ghostly, but far off the moonlight only makes things lovelier. Everything is a little mystified in its treacherous beams, only the mountain's outline looks more simply clear than even in daylight, when white vapours are prone to stray upon the border. Monte Bruno's three cones stand, in even row, against the southern sky, and the moon is so bright that you can see the large chestnut that grows in one of the curves. Mon Pilato rears a tall mass into the nearer distance. The Cappellano's cottage stands quite in the shadow of the oratory of San Gian-Battista, and there is even no light in the window this evening ; but ghosts are few in the pious valleys of the Scrivia — Bianca has no fears.

‘Are you at home, *Frà Giuseppe?*’ she calls from below.

‘Who is it wants me at this hour of night?’ growls the under priest, as he comes out upon the stone balcony beneath his porch? ‘And is it you, *Bianca bella?* Come up, come up only !’ Even a priest is appeased by the

sight of a pretty girl. ‘Who would have thought of *your* coming to visit an old man like me?’

The Cappellano knows as well as another what is likely to be the errand of a damsels who seeks him after working hours! But he is not in canonicals, and would not be averse to a little amusement on his own account before the love-letter business begins.

‘Come in, *Bianca bella*, I have two mushrooms in oil on the hearth, that, if I don’t mistake, you will thank me right prettily for when you have eaten!’

‘*O bella!*’ cries the girl laughing, ‘*Bella come il fondo della padella*’ (pretty as the bottom of the frying-pan), ‘as the proverb says. You don’t take me in with that kind of fun. I come on business.’

But even while she speaks Bianca has seated herself on the bench beside the hearth, and is proving the merits of the mushrooms.

‘How goes it, Ninetta?’ says she the while to the old servant. You have a fine time of it with this man, I can take my oath. If I live to be a hundred, I’ll have nothing to do with men.’

Master and maid burst into a loud laugh.

‘I suppose it’s not to see the colour of my ink that you’ve come again to-night, then, you little liar!’

The Cappellano makes as though to pinch her cheek,

but thinks better of it, for the girls of this village are very proud.

'Well, well, I have a new bottle of beautiful red ! Oh, what *funghi*, eh ? Come into my study. I never do business in the kitchen. Ninetta has the long tongue ; and a love-letter, why, it's as delicate a matter as the confessional !'

'*Vossignoria* can easily jest, because you are but a priest, who knows nothing of these things'—Bianca blushes and is pleased as she says this—'but indeed it is of no love that I speak to night, and that you might have known me better than to suppose !'

More laughing; nobody believes a word that anybody else says ! More chattering, and a little good, sound gossip ; then the Cappellano leads the way to his study. It is not very different from the kitchen. Instead of a hearth in the middle of the floor, there is an old, rough-hewn table ; instead of bright copper and earthenware vessels upon the walls, there are strangely-coloured maps of the two hemispheres. Two or three books bound in white calf—breviaries perhaps—lean to one or other side of the bookcase shelves ; in the table's midst is an ink-stand with a sponge soaked into it, a sand-pot, and a steel pen. The Cappellano sits before these implements, takes a sheet of pink paper from a drawer, dips the pen in the ink, shakes it, writes the date, and awaits further

orders of Bianca, who stands smiling to herself in a corner.

She has a blooming, winsome face, grey eyes that are soft and shady, and crisply waving hair ; she has full lips, too, and lovely rows of white gleaming teeth, and she laughs as she pulls a letter from her pocket.

‘This is the one which he wrote to me,’ she continues. ‘Perhaps you may like to see it, that you may know the style that will fit him best.’

‘No, no ! my daughter ; I have written many a love-letter, and can trust to my own sense,’ grumbles the *scrivano*, as he sets pens and paper in order, for he has his own well-worn phrases ready flowing to hand, and would be greatly discomfited at having to invent any new ones. He puts on his spectacles, smoothes the fair sheet of paper, and, dipping his pen in the ink, again glances up at the girl for instructions. She meanwhile stands awkwardly before him, smiling to herself, and ejaculating beneath her breath, as she twirls her apron mechanically round finger and thumb.

‘But I never said it was a love-letter,’ she says at last, laughing again.

‘Eh, well, well, my daughter. A letter to a gallant, then ? What matter ? it’s all the same thing. Tell me his name, and whether you mean to have him or no, and then leave the rest to me.’

'But no, *Signor Cappellano*,' remonstrates the damsel eagerly; 'it is not just so. You must understand the affair.' And she comes closer to the table, for Bianca wants to have a finger in the matter herself.

'You see,' she says, 'the young man is rich and fine, they tell me, and a good match for me, a poor *contadina*: I don't want to send him quite away. But then, I don't just know either if he will suit me or no! Now you, who know the Latin, and are fine and wise, you can put it grandly, what I mean.'

'Yes, yes, my daughter, surely; so tell me what to write first.'

'Well, first you shall put,' and Bianca plays again with her apron, 'You shall put—that I have received his letter,' she blurts forth, as though struck with a good and sudden thought.

The fine steel pen proceeds to work, and makes a few flourishes on the pink paper, while the girl looks on, eager and intent.

'That have I written,' says the *scrivano* at last. 'What next?'

'And next, next! You shall put that he does too much honour to a poor peasant girl such as I.' Again the pen moves warily over the paper, and this sentence takes long to indite, for it can be inflated with many a fine word and sentiment; but in time the *scrivano* looks



*The Love Letter.*

The fine steel pen proceeds to work, and makes a few flourishes on the pink paper, while the girl looks on, eager and intent.



up for fresh matter. The girl is sorely perplexed, indeed.

'But, *vossignoria*, who knows Latin,' says she again, 'can you not put together a fine letter?'

'That can I do, my daughter; but do you wish me to say he shall come and see you or no?'

'Well, you will understand, *vossignoria*, this is about how it is. Pietro Gambari is a rich young man, and I am only a *contadina*. For me, I should not mind being a miller's wife, but it is not enough that the man tells me I am *graziosa*, and would give me earrings.'

'The Virgin forbid!' ejaculates *Frà Giuseppe*.

'Well, that's what I say, and so I spoke up to him, "Signor Pietro, if you wish to know of me," said I "you can ask Pasquale, the baker, at Ponte, and for me I will inform myself of you." And that I have done surely, but Pasquale has heard no word of this fine youth, so when he lets it be written to me whether I go to the fair at Damigiano or no, I wish to say, "Signor Pietro, it may happen I go and it may happen I stay at home," and who knows but that may bring him to his senses! Oh, but you who know the Latin will understand better than a poor girl like me!'

'Surely, surely, *figlia mia*,' replies the Cappellano, returning to his flourishes on the paper, 'we will say all that and more.' Yet, in truth, he is somewhat puzzled

at the prospect of something outside of the elegant ready-made phrases that have served the parish for sentiment during the last twelve years. Bianca begins to grow suspicious after a few dozen lines.

'You understand,' she says, 'he must come, and he must not think I want him to come. So I shall go on the arm of Pasquale, and if he comes I shall leave those two to arrange the business as well as they can. Not another smile from me till I see the gold of his gifts to me and know his position! I am an honest girl, and no fool! And who knows but it might please your honour to tell him,' adds she, as though struck by an after-thought, 'that Paolo of our village is speaking to the *manente* about me! It would be but a white lie, for it was true a while ago, and I could tell it quickly in confession!'

'Oh, for that, no matter; but it is whether he would believe it, my daughter!' replied *Fra Giuseppe*. Nevertheless, something he writes down. Poor credulous Bianca!

'I want naught else,' says she now, thinking of her pence.

But the priest means to earn something more yet out of this weary letter.

'You have said nothing, hitherto,' he complains! 'Poor young man! He won't know if you mean to have

him or no ! One must give him at least to understand if you mean to look favourably on his suit.'

' But if I don't know myself ? '

' Eh, eh, *per Bacco* ; what is to be done then ? '

There is a long pause. The *scrivano's* pen glides cunningly over the sheet : it forms capital letters, and small letters, and flourishes ; it reaches the bottom of the page, and then he takes the sand-box to sprinkle it over. Bianca has looked on gloomily. She has been watching her little earnings ebb sadly away in all those lines, and strokes, and dots, and yet it seems as though she were to get no good out of this epistle. She is very sore and angry.

' Is there anything more ? ' says the little man, at last, in a provokingly mild tone.

' No, *per Bacco*, there is no more ! Is not that enough ? ' she mutters crossly.

' But I have said no word as to whether you will have him or no ! '

' Eh, Holy Virgin ! Say what you will ! I care not ! For the rest, so long as you make it fine, he will not understand much of what you mean, unless he is more of an ass than I take him for. Give here,' she concludes, petulantly, ' till I put my cross.'

And the letter is sanded once more, as Bianca pulls out her silken netted purse.

'How much?' demands she; 'and are you sure the affair will lead to a good end?'

'The Virgin will see to your right, child, but twenty *soldi* are not too much for this. I say it with a clean conscience!'

'*Dio!* what a bold heart you have to rob a poor girl so! And if Signor Pietro does not come after all, and if I am forced to content myself with a peasant?'

'*Eh, anima mia,* that will not be my fault!'

'But it will be the fault of your letter! Oh, these men, when I could have written it so well myself! But I can tell you, you may keep your fine scrawl many a day before I give you a franc for it. Ten *soldi*, come!'

'My child, you dream! Ten *soldi*! I might have made two *Spiriti Santi* in the time. Impossible! Eighteen.'

'Nevermore,' declares Bianca, staunchly. 'Before I pay you eighteen *soldi* I take the letter to some one who knows how to read, and I make myself be told if you have said what I required.'

The poor *scrivano* begins to get frightened. What would this bode? He might never write a letter again. Make it fifteen *soldi*,' he pleads.

And long and hotly they wrangle ere the price can be fixed between them, but at length a compromise is effected. *Frà Giuseppe* is to put up with twelve *soldi*

now, and to have a hand in the marriage ceremony, if the letter fulfil its purpose. What more could justice demand? The document is folded and sealed. Bianca exchanges it for the dirty coppers, and with a hasty leave-taking makes her way across the stream and up the rugged path to the thatched house, under the chestnuts. Neither Pietro Gambari, nor *soldi*, nor Cappellano, trouble her slumbers much in spite of all apparent excitement. Even a white lie rests lightly on a conscience of eighteen years old, that gets up at four in the morning.

## La Cresima.

The Confirmation Day.

THE cherries are over ; neither large, black nor small bright ones are on the trees now, and the wood-strawberries were forgotten long ago. The grapes begin to flush purple-red over their pale green skins : soon they will be ready for the vintage. But the grapes are not havoc for the village children, and if it were not for many another kind of fruit that grows on trees, and can, happily, not be made into wine, it would be a weary time till the walnut harvest came round ! Heaven be praised, there are large purple plums and larger yellow plums and little blue plums that may all be climbed for, letting alone the peaches, and apricots, and figs, and the large pears, that are ripe enough now for the taste of any simple-minded village child !

And summer is play-time. Nobody thinks of the girls till winter is well in, and then it is only one or two out of the whole village gang whose mothers will spare them to learn reading of the *Signor Prevosto* of an evening, or knitting and darning of *Ninetta del Cappellano* in the forenoon.

But whatever is done in the bleak months, we have not long passed the dog days now, and no mother gives a thought to any child but the swaddled puppet who hangs at her breast, or the tall damsel who can weave at the handloom and fetch back purchases from town or fair. So Virginia had naught else to do all the days of the summer but be up and down, with the rest of the village children, amid the hamlets and through the woods, across meadows and streams. Her mother is Maddalena, the wife of Pietro the *pedone*, but she has six children, and four of them are girls, who are of an age to help in the house and the fields. Virginia thanks the Virgin that she has been of more use out of the way than anywhere else !

Till last week nobody thought of her ; she was one of the village torments, neither more nor less : one of the children who shout at festivals, and stare and wonder at mass when a newcomer enters the church ; one of those village inflictions who are always up other people's fruit trees, yet never get properly punished ; one of that dark-eyed, walnut-hued gang, whose feet are always shoeless, whose hair is always rough, whose garments are always in rags ; one of the rest, in fact, to share and share alike, excepting that when 'the rest' happen to be all boys it isn't much Virginia gets but a cuff here and there, and not much that she gives, for the matter

of that, but a good blow back again ! That was how Beppo came by his black eye yesterday, perhaps, and Virginia by that ugly rent in her apron !

Well, till last week, nobody thought of Virginia ; but last Monday, when the *pedone* went to Ponte Novo with the letters, he was accompanied by the pretty Nettina, who is Virginia's eldest sister, and in Ponte Novo Nettina bought a piece of stuff, for which she bargained many a long hour, on and off, and which was just enough of a remnant to make the child a new frock. And it was no flimsy print material either, but a bit of woollen fabric, for is not Virginia's father the postman, and must not his child look more fitly dressed than a mere poorest *contadina* when she goes to take *la Cresima* from the Archbishop ?

Yes, truly this is the great event to which we look forward, and we have been thinking of it ever since the San Giovanni, when it was given out in church. No wonder that the mother has been saving her *soldi* very zealously, for after the *Cresima* Virginia must make her *prima communione*, and Pietro's wife would suffer a good deal of privation rather than not make a fitting show with each of her girls on such an event. Even the child herself grumbles at no loss of bird-nesting or fruit-stealing when it comes to such a grave matter as making a better figure than anyone else ! - She is only

nine years old, and knows no more of the mighty problems that she will have to believe ere the week is out, than does any other little girl of the same age who has run wild all her life among the brambles. But the Archbishop does not come round very often, and many of the children must needs be confirmed as young.

So Marrina, the sempstress, sets to work upon the little lithe figure, and, though she has plenty to do with all the other confirmation children, she will make a grown-up little gown, that shall fit to the childish form as the mother's fits to full and ripe proportions—a little gown that will set in at the waist and fall down to the ankles, with beautiful trimming on the sleeves, and buttons up the front: henceforth Virginia will be a woman. Then to vie with the new frock Virginia has a pair of new shoes, a little black apron, and a transparent veil arranged over the tightly-plaited hair and falling over the proud little childish face. What finer costume could any town-child boast?

The great day is here. It is August—an August so hot and so dry that even the sturdy *contadini* have been murmuring at such heat for harvesting. The wheat has been gathered in, and the vines upon their trellises stand out brighter than ever against the shorn hillsides. Those damsels who have care of the church were at work all yesterday; they swept, and washed, and gar-

nished, and then they adorned the sanctuary with those choicest of adornments that only come out on the best of all the *feste*. Above the great picture of Rachel at the Well there are draperies of amber damask, and the high altar is profusely laden with every description of artificial flower, with tinsel stars and hearts and gaudy streamers. ‘Truly it will look well when the wax candles are alight,’ says Nettina, whose work are the paper flowers! Upon the side altars hang gorgeous embroideries, and around the pictures and the organ-loft more of the orthodox crimson damask.

It is evening: six o’clock. He will soon be here. For he is to arrive to-night, and to address the flock briefly from the church steps, before he retires to rest his portly form under the Parroco’s humble roof. The *Cresima* will be given to-morrow morning at seven.

Caterina, the Parroco’s servant, is in a fever of flurry and nervousness, for *he* is the Archbishop, and he brings two *Cappellani* with him! Besides which there will be all the neighbouring clergy to dinner to-morrow, at mid-day! *Bonità di Dio!* The bells are at work merrily —so merrily that no one can hear the first of the popguns that shall announce the approach of his Holiness. Six of the handsomest village swains have gone up the mountain to meet him. Swains of the village whence he comes, will bear him in sedan chair to the

confines of the parish, but on San Matteo's frontier it will be San Matteo's duty to provide for the progress of the guest. So six of our best grown lads have gone up the road as far as the turn where, if you went up with them, you would have a view of valleys and mountains that stretch as far away as to the sea. The Signor Prevosto is nervous. He stands upon the church porch in canonicals and snaps at *Frà Giuseppe*, who, also in canonicals, offers curious suggestions as to means and manners.

'Here are baskets and enough of plucked flowers,' says he, 'but no one is ready to shower them before his Holiness! Pick me out two clean girls from among you to do this work!'

There are many 'clean'—even pretty—girls among the village damsels, much prettier girls than those daughters of townfolk in *villeggiatura*, but the *contadine* are all too bashful, even whilst longing for so prominent a post, and it is only just as the pop-guns go off again, and the bells cease jangling because the great man is close by, that two maidens are found, who, being children of Maso, the baker, feel themselves worthy of so mighty an office. '*Eccolo, eccolo!*' The piazza is full of people, and with one voice they raise the shout. His shoes with the bright steel buckles rest against the foot-board of a lowly sedan chair! His purple stockings have not been too grand to be donned for 'us lowly pea-

sants !' His broad, red face beams on the company, and his sacerdotal hat crowns all, as the baker's girls strew their gorse and daisies ! Truly, the village swains have been honoured in bearing so goodly a burden ! They rest, and mop their hot brows as *l'Arcivescovo* descends to greet the people, and, ascending the church steps, prepares to give them his friendly address.

*Dio !* how short it is ! One has barely time to note the folds of his garments, the shape of his cuffs, or the turn of his hat ! But he is tired and hungry, *povero sant'uomo !* And does not the whole village know that Caterina has a supper prepared that would tempt the Lord himself to forget his duty ? All the priests, big and little, file off through the piazza and through the gateway ; they go past the oratory and under the *campanile*, and up into the Prevosto's garden. The Archbishop is very fat ; he has to be helped up the broken stone steps that lead to the piazzetta, where vines hang and climb on the *pergola*, where gourds ripen in the sun, and the fountain trickles and the cherries lie drying in flat baskets. The Prevosto makes many excuses for his lowly fare and lowlier habitation ; but is it not the will of the Holy Church that he should have no better ? The great man and his chaplains eat their supper bravely, nevertheless, whilst the villagers gather in knots to talk them over ; then they all go to bed until the daybreak of the morrow.

Virginia wakes with the greyest of the dawn. It is a fine day for her—one that will never come again till the day she is married and then—are there not graver responsibilities therewith? The 'remnant' has been enough to make a gown as quaint as any little maiden could desire, but this little maiden has a fear lest it should be too quaint, lest the girls of the walnut-grove should eclipse her! New shoes, a new kerchief, and the lace veil go far, however, to restore her complacency.



VIRGINIA GOES TO CONFIRMATION.

The family get under way, and set off towards the church, Virginia walking two paces in front of the rest, as befits so great a personage. Upon the piazza she must fall into the ranks of children of her own parish, for many other parishes have sent candidates to this *Cresima*. So they enter. The organ-loft is thronged with parents and relations, and other spectators have climbed to the gallery which encircles the roof; the nave is exclusively reserved for the priests and their prey. Behind and around a barricade covered with crimson damask, the candidates are ranged in methodically-moving ranks, while the bishop and his priests stand in the midst, ready to perform upon each advancing boy or girl. The organ sounds, it plays merry waltzes and pathetic love-songs, with now and then a warlike march. '*Il nostro Arcivescovo*' stands and mutters low, whilst he dabs each newly-presented cheek with oil from his sacred phial, and anoints each separate ear. Then the chaplain wipes the oil off again, and for each the deed has been done. 'What a mercy it didn't drop upon my dress,' thinks Virginia, and fans herself with her first fan, and feels her new earrings. How nice it is to be a *figlia di prima communione*, but alas, how many more there are still to have the oil, and how long it will be before we can eat plums again and climb for apricots !

At last the great day is drawing to its close. Everybody has amused themselves well. There was so much fine music, you might almost fancy you were at the opera—from what we've heard tell of it! And so much beautiful damask and false flowers and incense! Paradise could not much excel such a place, especially as everyone had their best things on!

'Did you see Marrina? Not pure wool, that! And Tomasina—well, hers was a real silk stripe in the material. But Tomasina is proud! I wouldn't be proud like that—I'd as soon have a *bordato* gown!' says one. 'And the holy man's sermon! That did make one laugh! He doesn't know much about us, that's evident! Would have made the prevosto out to be a saint!' continues another.

'The Prevosto knows better than to come over us with such nonsense! As if he were the Madonna's own friend! Patience, they've got to be so in church! And of course it's only right a priest should talk fine when he gets into the pulpit or the confessional! Where would our poor souls be otherwise?' objects a third.

Everybody has had their dinner. The Archbishop and the priests ate Catterina's mushrooms and *risotto* and *polpette*, while Virginia had real holiday *ravioli*, with plenty of honour and glory for condiment. To-morrow mother Maddalena will have enough to do thinking

of her family as a whole, but to-day Virginia is the child *par excellence*.

After dinner there is more congregating, more admiring of garments; then more church, when the great man sings vespers in a splendid cope, and Virginia still keeps on her frock, if not her veil, and rests content that she looks as well as little Bianca of the village on the hill. But now it is all over. The fine trappings are put away—the church's damasks stored in the press of the Sacristy, and Virginia's frock in an old oaken chest at home. The Arcivescovo is gone, and the walnuts will soon be ripe, with the chestnut harvest coming quickly on. Virginia has her rags on again and is up the trees, but she has not forgotten her *vestito di lana*, nor how *la Cresima* has made a woman of her.

## In Villeggiatura.

### Town Folk in the Country.

*La Signora Pareto* lives in town—Via degl' Uffiziali, No. 4. She lives at the top of 149 steps, on the sixth floor of a very new and very pink house in the most recent suburbs of the city. It takes such a long time and, when one has only one maid-servant, and is blessed with six children, time is a precious thing—it takes such a long time and, for a lady of *la Signora Pareto*'s goodly proportions, it takes so many more long breaths than she can, in wisdom, spare to get up those said hundred and forty-nine steps, that, it may safely be stated, neither mamma nor children go out for a walk more than once a month. What would you have? Children would wear their very souls to rags if the good Lord weren't wiser than to leave souls in people's own keeping, and you couldn't let folk see them in plain things any more than you can let them wear out their best ones: that is only natural!

So it comes to be just about once in a month

\*that *la Signora Pareto* thinks it is time to have the children's faces washed and their short hair, that was shaved last summer, brushed up in a ridge on their crowns, and their hats with the bright flowers and feathers put on, while she herself dons silken and trailing garments for a walk in the lime-scented *Acquasola*. Who would believe this to be the same Signora Pareto who, with heel-trodden slippers and loosened gown, stirs the *polenta*, and fans the fire, and shrilly scolds the children on the top floor of No. 4 Via degl' Uffiziali? And who would recognise in the primly-walking and stiffly-dressed boys and girls of the public gardens those scantily-attired mortals who hunt the house-top above the sixth floor, and peril their necks on dangerous parapets, and furtively feel for small spoil in the kitchen, and get whipped for venial sins in theft and fibbing?

The lady mother walks with portly, swaying frame and upright head, that black tresses profusely adorn; behind her trail yards of green silk in the gravel's dust, and on her broad bosom, mock gold and stones glitter, for alas, she is not of the peasant women, who fear aught but the true metal! And the children plod primly two-and-two, with all that tells of childhood carefully hidden from the much-revered gaze of the world, and too proud of furbelowed frocks to think of any other enjoyment, to borrow any youthful glee from the sweet-

scented acacias or the flowering laburnum and purple Judas-blossoms.

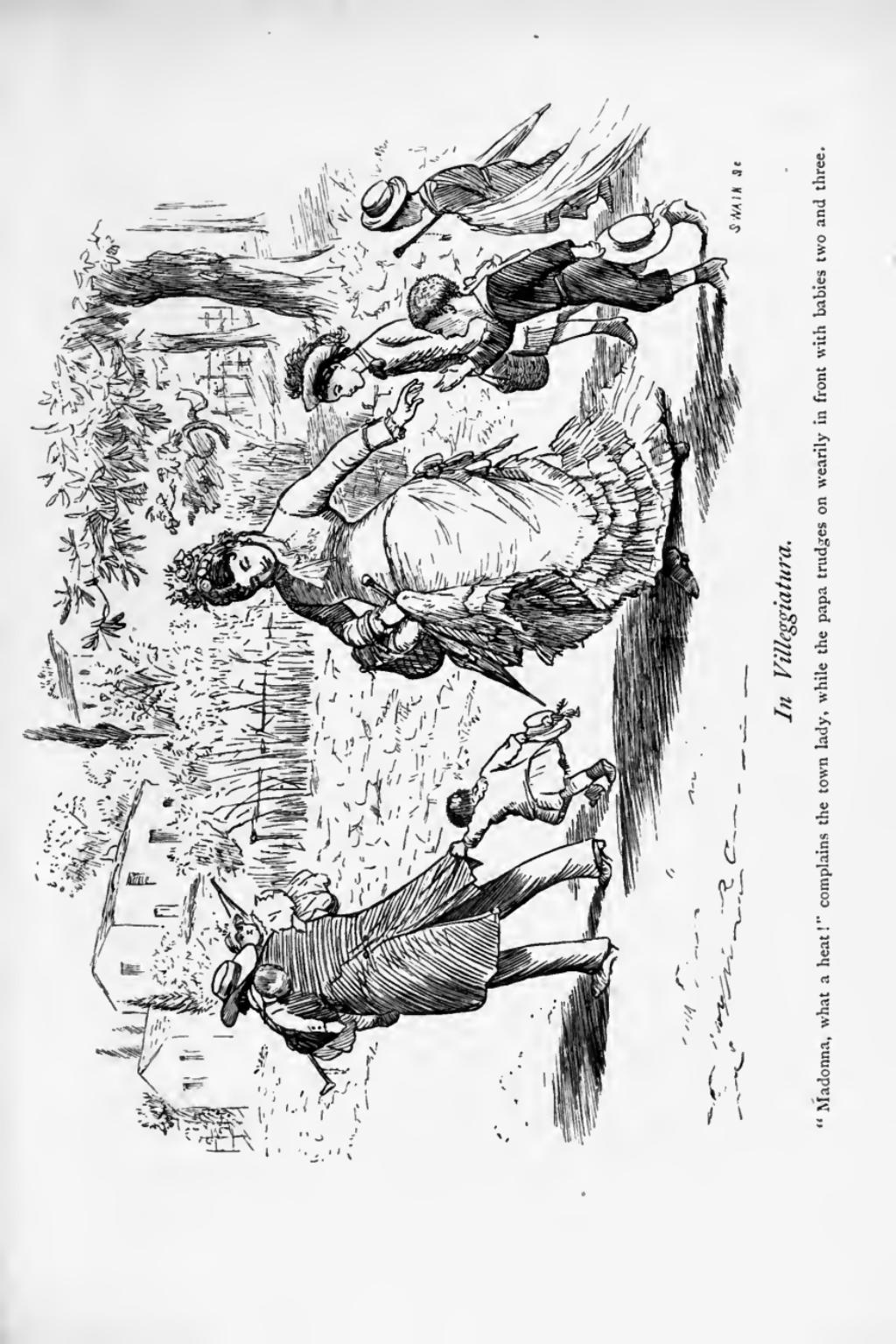
No wonder that not much of country pink flushes the cheeks of the poor town-bred babies who get so little fresh, free air ; no wonder that from time to time the town-bred mother, who thinks more of outward show than of any other human advantage, begins to note the pallid hue on her offsprings' faces, begins to long for a bit of rough life, where they can rejoice in heaven's pure air without new frocks, and where her own battered slippers and torn skirts will be good enough to breathe a mouthful of honest wind in, when the wind blows around homely meadows and cottages, where the great world's criticism does not, happily, penetrate.

*La Signora Pareto* has a brother-in-law who is a great *negoziante* ; he is rich, richer far than herself—which is a trial when one is in town, for appearances must be kept up, and the brother-in-law's wife has to be vied with ! But when the time comes for going in *villeggiatura* then those riches in the family are an advantage, because there is a little house up in the Apennines, some mile or two from Busalla, that belongs to the brother-in-law, and which one may have for very little money, if a little squabbling and haggling be added thereto.

So one day at the end of July the family from the sixth floor in Via degl' Uffiziali makes a move. The

\*maid-of-all-work is sent home—in the country one does not only half, but all, the cooking oneself, and has a village girl in to help! The good papa takes charge of numbers four, five, and six, because his arms are the strongest; the shrill-voiced mamma attempts to keep three elder boys in order, whose spirits are quite too much for them at the prospect, first of a journey, and then of green trees, and fruit to plunder! One kisses the neighbours all the way down the staircase—inmates of pianos five, four, &c.—one reaches the station, one takes many a second-class ticket, half and whole. After an hour's slow progress, sitting in a railway carriage, with the din of children in the ears, and, in the nostrils, the smell of truffles and fish and such things as cannot be procured in the country, one descends at last on the platform of a little station, and lifts out the joyful half-dozen of one's progeny!

How green the trees are, how fresh the breeze, even along the dusty highway, that would lead across the mountains of the Giove, were one not minded to turn aside and follow the torrent's course to left! Paolo and Checchino, and even the little Emilia, feel it blow pleasantly, indeed, upon their almost bare heads that were short-shaven again yesterday for the season of recess! They caper gladly along the road, while father and mother exchange greetings and compliments with



*In Villeggiatura.*

"Madonna, what a heat!" complains the town lady, while the papa trudges on wearily in front with babies two and three.



fruit-sellers and barbers in the town's little street, with peasant men and women as they strike out into the free country beyond.

The chestnut leaves are broad and full on the boughs of trees to the road's right hand, the river runs idly to left, and beyond the river more turf springs and more chestnuts grow upon it. Woods flourish, with meadows, and fields, and vineyards. After the village of Ponte is past—with the bridge over the stream whence the carriage-road begins to run to left of it—when the last of the houses, that have been built for summer visitors, is behind, papa and mamma Pareto have a rougher and stonier way along which to drive their little flock—for the brother-in-law's cottage lies up the side valley of *la Valle Calda*. ‘*Madonna*, what a heat!’ complains the town lady, loosening the scarf around her throat! And even the children's strength begins to ebb into fretfulness, while the papa trudges along wearily in front with babies two and three. It is three miles from Busalla to the parish church of the village, and town heat has not been apt to fit anyone for work. ‘*Andiamo, Nina*, thou art truly the laziest of all, because thou art tall! Fie and for shame!’ scolds the mother to her eldest-born girl.

But the tall campanile is in sight at last, and everybody plucks up courage to take and give friendly

greetings courteously. The Prevosto comes out on the *piazza* with his serving-maid behind ; the Cappellano descends the rugged steps of his dwelling to give a welcome. Neither priest is in canonicals—the one has been tilling the soil, and the other pruning the vines—but the family of Pareto are no sticklers for etiquette when once out of town. Compliments and greetings flow graciously, words and jokes fly swiftly ; the children are admired, the village news is told. Then the party moves onward towards its destination, but escorted now and strengthened by gathering friends.

The sun is setting above the tree-tops of the little deep, dark dell beneath the church : it is night before parents and children are well installed in the black and white cottage that stands in the midst of open meadows, having maize fields around it, and a fence about its modest garden. The family has come by an afternoon train for the cool's sake, and it is time to go to bed before the well has even been visited hard by, or any of the familiar nooks ; indeed, the children are asleep almost before the fire has been lit for them to have their supper, and the sharp words of the mother, who is ever threatening punishments that have no room in her heart, fall but lightly on their ears.

The morning sun creeps softly down the side of tall Monte Mazzo opposite. When the Pareto family gets up

next morning, the cottage lies yet in shade, as do the meadows also and our own chestnut woods above the well, and even the *campanile*, with everything that is on this side, the torrent. ‘One must rise early to enjoy the Creator,’ says the mother, and the children are not prone to quarrel with her advice in these country days! With garments that already are faded and soon will be torn as well, with white-toed shoes and heads bare to the sun and the breezes, they scour the country betimes to visit their favourite haunts, to spoil the fruit trees that are in season, and to coax scrap and bit from neighbourly cauldrons and granaries. Nobody gives much thought to them all day. They are safe, for everybody knows them, and will take a turn at looking after them, safe as the peasant children themselves, of whom they are part and parcel now that town pride and strivings are left behind.

*La Signora Pareto* has gossip enough to do herself this first day. There is no need to hire any girl for a help *this* week, for there are neighbours and to spare who will gladly give a hand for the sake of a bit of city news! They must see once again the fine dress which the lady wore yesternight when she arrived! ‘Oh, but that is nothing! On the day of the Assumption, at mass and procession, you shall see what you shall see,’ boasts the town bird, and yet at the present moment her dress is

more slatternly by far than that of the peasant women who throng her kitchen. They wear skirts of dark home-spun linen, bright cotton kerchiefs, and aprons, but her garments are of threadbare woollen stuff and soiled, while a loose black bodice hangs carelessly upon her shoulders in place of the folded square, and her hair is still in the fashionable coils of last night, but rough now and disordered.

Caterina, the parsonage housekeeper, calls in now with a supply of eggs and vegetables to help out the first day's dinner. She thinks but slightly of *la Signora Pareto*'s grandeur as she looks on the stained and trailing skirts that are deemed good enough for the country—for Caterina is a strict and thrifty woman. But when the day of the Assumption comes, and the lady of the cottage comes to mass, then even the priest's servant is forced to admit that her costume is one 'truly of luxury!' For the silk dress with the train that Marrina, the village sempstress, declared would have reached right over to America, where the emigrants go—the violet silk and the gold ornaments, and the French cashmere shawl, have all been thought worthy of so grand an occasion! Nina, the firstborn, has her hat and feathers on, and her white frilled petticoat, whilst even the boys have been promoted to cleanliness.

The day is bright even amid this dazzling summer brightness. Spite of the heat, meadows are fresh and the wooded turf, because of many rills that water the valley. Orchis and yellow lady's-slipper and broom have come in place of the ragged robins and the buttercups, and upon the open land over the hills the little pink heather blossom will soon be abloom. The river winds slowly, the mountains make a dark, dented line upon the calm sky, all around, the chestnut woods stir in the breeze, and droop their boughs upon the green grass.

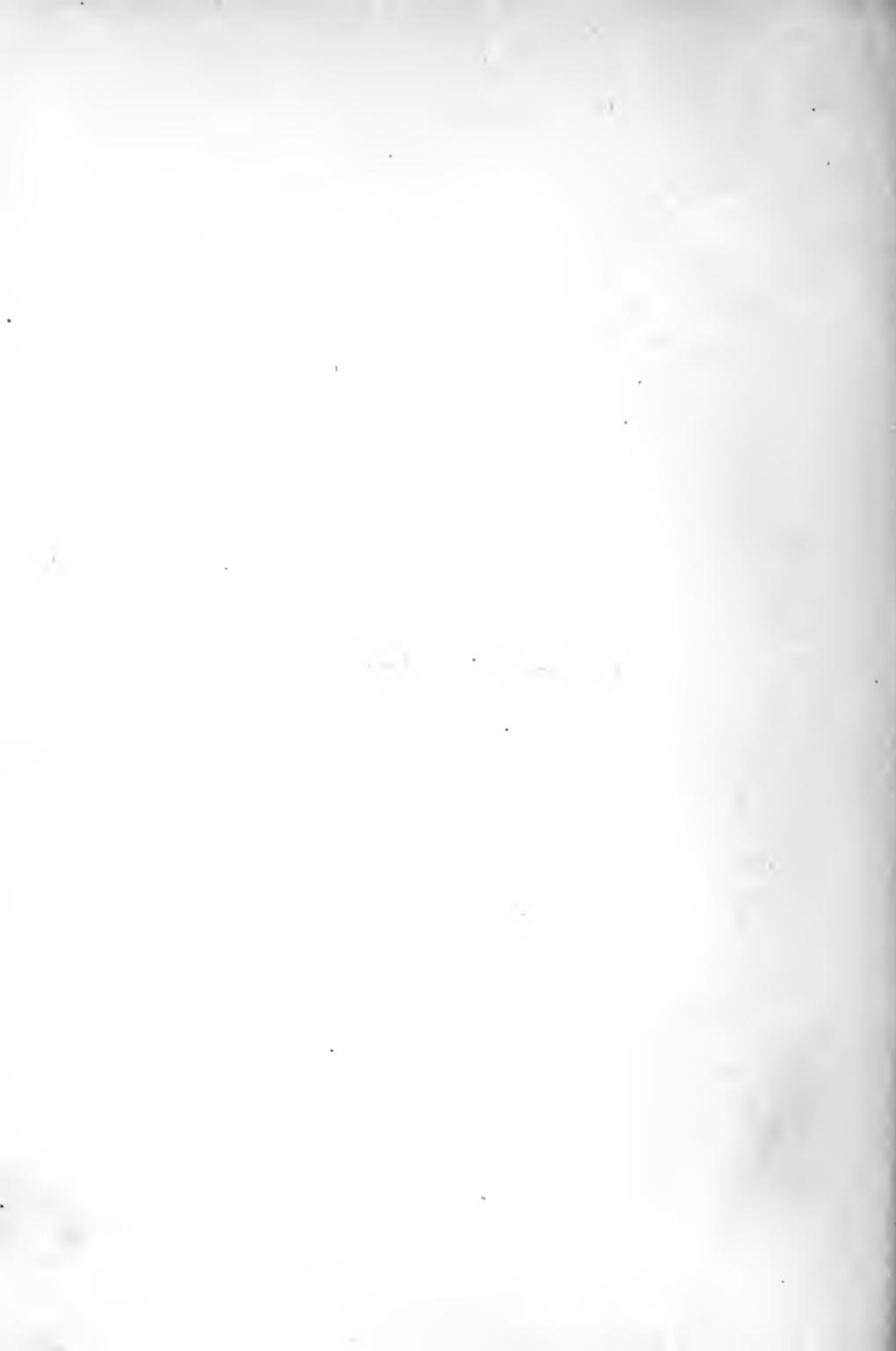
The stars on the Virgin's blue robe glitter in the sunlight as the procession winds up across the fields, by the well, and by the cottage of the town family, to come back again along the river path into the church. And *la Signora Pareto* is proud to walk behind the Holy Madonna, for she is well-dressed, and people stare even more at *her* garments than at the Virgin's own, which they have seen many times. 'It is even more worth while to don one's finery here than in town,' thinks the lady, for in town there is always a fear it may pass unnoticed in the crowd! But all the same one must do one's economy in the country. For what else does one come but to economise, and to rejoice in the Creator, as *la Signora Pareto* says? So to-morrow the soiled grey skirts will be on again, the children will be shoeless

and ragged, and we shall eat *minestra* of beans in place of *ravioli* for dinner.

But the cool air fans freshly all the same upon the children's cheeks, meadows are soft and fragrant that lie around the black-and-white house—the garden grows peas and beans and gourds and lettuce beneath the fruit trees, and this is matter of interest to everybody. The vines trail wildly across the kitchen window, and boys and girls think it fine fun to blow the sulphur upon them that keeps off the fell disease. Who cares whether children's clothes are rent and threadbare, since roses are coming to their cheeks in the wild, free life and the good air of this Apennine *villeggiatura* ?

## CONCLUSION.

T



## **Il Corpus Domini.**

### **The Procession.**

A JUNE day's dawn breaks white over the land, and in its wake comes the sun, glorious to shine where dew-drops have lain cool through the short summer night. They lie still on plucked flowers and herbage in the town market of S. Domenico, though the sun rose half an hour ago, and they lie thicker on soft green turf and gently stirring blossoms, beneath the breezy chestnut woods of Apennine or Riviera mountains.

And the fair fine weather gladdens many a heart to-day, for it is the feast of the Corpus Domini. Whether in country cottages or in city streets—those small and darker streets where dwell the working people, who yet can be moved by a feast day—in homes that stand beneath a cool green shade, as in flats that have but the sadder shade from tall, town houses opposite—all rise early on this hot June morning, because after mass there is the great procession. Many folk, young and old, poor and gentle, donned holiday dress to see the carnival of Martedì Grasso and, of these, all are, perhaps, not left to

wear their best clothes again for this other pageant that is of the Church.

But Rosina, the fair *fioraja*, still combs her long black hair and smiles to show her fine white teeth, and, from her room beside the camellia-beds of the Peschiere, she comes forth adorned for the day. And many others walk beside her in the procession, who stood beside her, perhaps, to see the blessing of the palms at S. Lorenzo, and knelt in divers churches before the *Santo Sepolcro*.

Maddalena, the little servant wench, walks behind the great cross in crisply-smoothed *pezzotto* and ear-drops that were new for the sister's festival of the first communion. She is proud to be so near the procession's heart, and glances along the ranks to see the crimson banners floating aloft, and the Virgin's images, to marvel at the great throng of priests, where the Archbishop bears the Host beneath gaudy panoply. Yet Maddalena cannot see the whole of the great sight so well as can *la padrona*, who sits on a convenient balcony of the Via Nuova, and sprinkles flowers upon the crowd, while she listens to compliments from the rich silk mercer at her side, and secretly admires that very dress which her little maid has so often assured her is becoming.

Not even *la Pettinatrice*, who has secured a side window through hair-dressing acquaintance, can see the great silver ark that holds the ashes of S. John, so closely

as can *la De' Maroni*, whose plaits she has greased this morning, or *la Contessa Capramonte*, who sits on a family terrace, with fair coils twisted by Marrina's own hands, and silken draperies purchased at the shop of fat Signor Giordano, gazing placidly from a plebeian ground-floor opposite. For these, on their balconies, are above the heads of the crowd, and close where the procession must pass. Sprinkling their gorse-bloom and camellias, they can look along the winding stream of the people, and see the companies of friars and monks and Jesuits, the ranks of municipal orders, gorgeous in civic dress, the blue-robed children of the Virgin, the crosses and banners and saints, till the shaven crowns of officiating priests are just below them, and rich vestments glitter, and incense from acolytes' censers floats around the Archbishop's panoply, ere it is wafted to the very windows where they kneel.

But, for all the grandeur and the throng, perhaps the town-folk have not the best of it. At Bogliasco, where fisher-folk live, bells have been ringing for the Corpus Domini as well, and Paolo has lounged about the church door, smoking pipes with Maso, while the fat fisherwife and Giannino and Nicoletta walked in the procession. At Ruta, on the hill, old Giovanni, the *manente*, has knelt to the passing Host also, and Maria has chattered whisperingly to the neighbours.

Though hot it has been, indeed, beneath the frail olive foliage and beside the shining blue sea at Camogli, the priests have not failed to go forth in their muffling copes under the panoply, chaunting the office and bearing the Host. Nor has Lucrezia, the lace-weaver, forgotten to carry the swaddled *bambino* to see the procession at Santa Margherita, while pop-guns were fired and men played at bowls on the high road.

Even Teresa—the thrifty housewife at Portofino Castle—has found time, amid manifold duties, to attend this most delicate of feasts, and has gone so far as to leave the premises in charge of the household drudge, while she follows the old *marchese* to the pageant of Corpus Domini.

These all prayed their prayers in stifling churches, and knelt by dusty waysides as the sacred Host went by, but, beneath the shady woods of the Apennines, cooler breezes have stirred the broad chestnut leaves upon this joyful June afternoon.

The parish priest has risen betimes, for the *Signor Cappellano* can only preach at second mass, and the sermons are many to be preached, the masses many to be sung on this greatest of holidays. Caterina, the spare serving maid, was all day yesterday baking the communion wafers, but even she finds time to don holiday garb and pace holiday paces to-day. Every-

body is not at the same morning mass, but everybody comes to vespers at three of the afternoon, and everybody walks in the procession.

That tall, strong wench, who is village story-teller in



THE PROCESSION OF THE CORPUS DOMINI.

chief—*Rosa la bruna*—walks first in the file, and bears the great cross that is silver-ornamented, while Nettina and others come behind with the candles. And everyone has on her dress of gay print or of stout woollen stuff, with golden ear-drops and freshly-smoothed veil.

She of the love-letter, is neither last nor least, the soft-eyed Bianca, whose gallant follows after with crimson banner! And the town lady is there too—that merchant's wife who rents the cottage in the fields, and whose children run rougher, amid country breezes, than the very peasants themselves: she wears the purple silk dress, with the long train and trimming of notoriety, while upon her ample bosom rests the gold chain, and across her fair tresses the black veil that is to distinguish her from the girls round about. She is proud to be thus gorgeous, and envied in the female crowd, proud that she can so vastly outshine even the portly dame who comes after—her whom they call the priest's cousin.

But Marrina, the sempstress, will not walk in procession, for she is short and stout, and there is wayfaring enough to be done in the world, says she! So, from the low seat of a rough stone wall, she sees the pageant go by. She nods scornfully to Rosa with the big cross—for Rosa is a curt-speaking girl—and sympathetically to Nettina with the small crucifix, who should have been the leader, thinks she, for Nettina is a free-and-easy one, more to the mind of this proud old lady. Then for a moment Marrina kneels painfully at the wayside, because the panoply passes, borne up by the miller and three farmers in red cotton robes, and beneath it walks the parish priest slowly, with stiffly gorgeous cope

about his shoulders and clumsy hands that bear aloft the Sacred Host. And secretly, as she prays, Marrina chuckles, for well she knows the priest loves not to pace, closely-robed, in procession on a hot June afternoon ! ‘But it is his duty,’ says the sempstress to herself gladly, as it is the fat *Cappellano’s* duty to uphold the vestments of his chief, in company with a second priest on the other side.

And, when the mumbling and panoplied trio have gone by, Marrina rises to her feet again, to wait for the Virgin’s blue-robed image, and to laugh at the staggering steps of Giovanni and his comrades as they carry Heaven’s Queen on their shoulders : to scoff also at the clumsiness of Pietro, who strives vainly to adjust her crown with his stick ! Then, scolding little Virginia, the confirmation-heroine, for her loud laughter with romping companions in the procession’s very midst, she, laughing herself, adds her ambling gait to the pageant’s outskirts, and climbs the church steps once more.

For the procession is over. Village boys, shrieking with delight, have fired the pop-guns in its honour ; the bells have ceased their jangle. The village bride has been admired, whose home is new beneath the cherry trees : the village swain has whisperingly begged a promise of the village belle for the dance later on in the meadows. Bianca has brought the affair of the love-letter to a

fortunate close on this very church porch ; Caterina rests from scolding the priest. A glamour of coming night begins to creep down from the mountains upon the valley, and, though still the river flows and still Mon Pilato stands against the twilight, our tale is told, our procession is finished. Town folk and country folk have all passed away in its wake.

THE END.





March, 1878.



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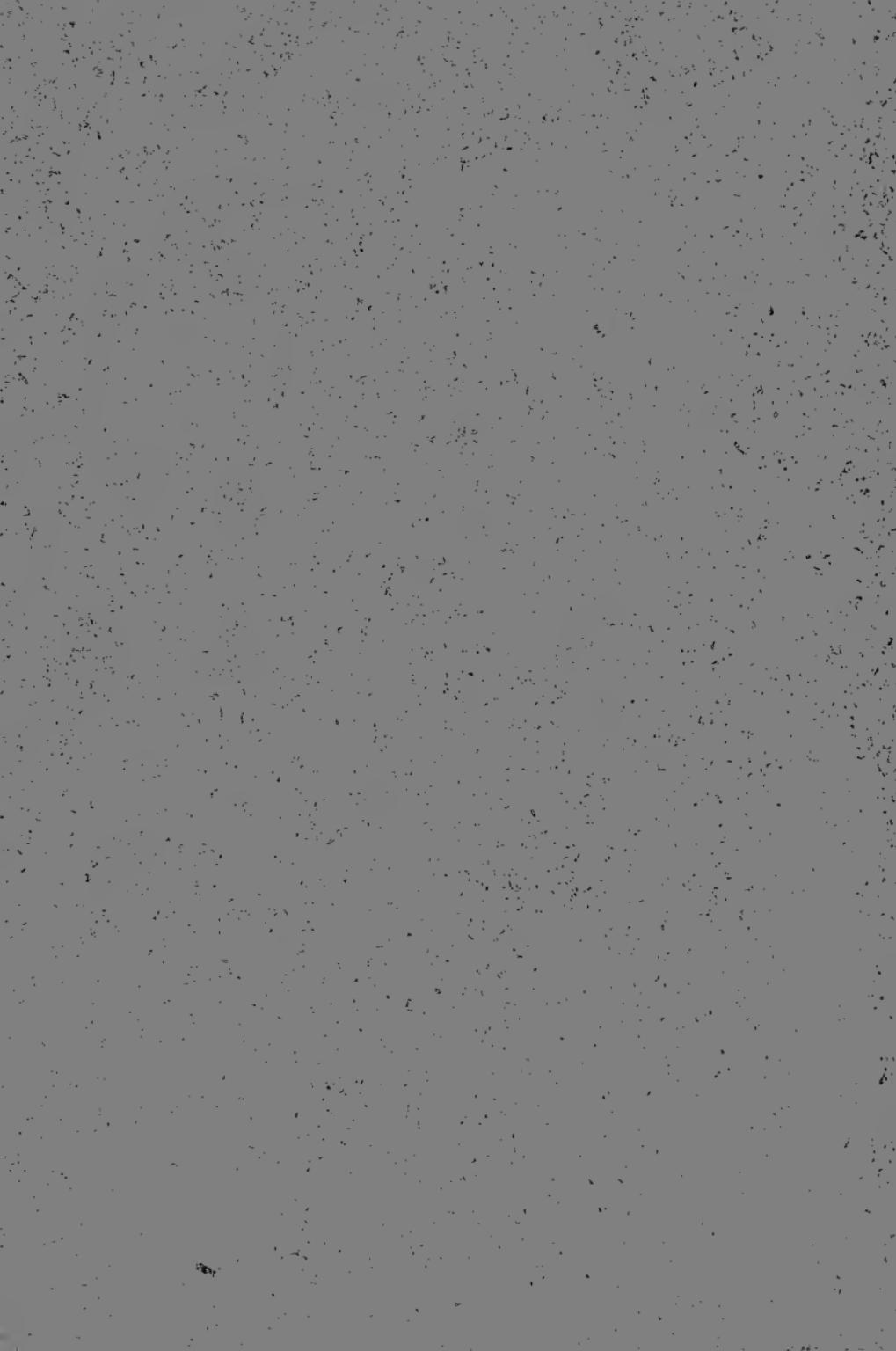
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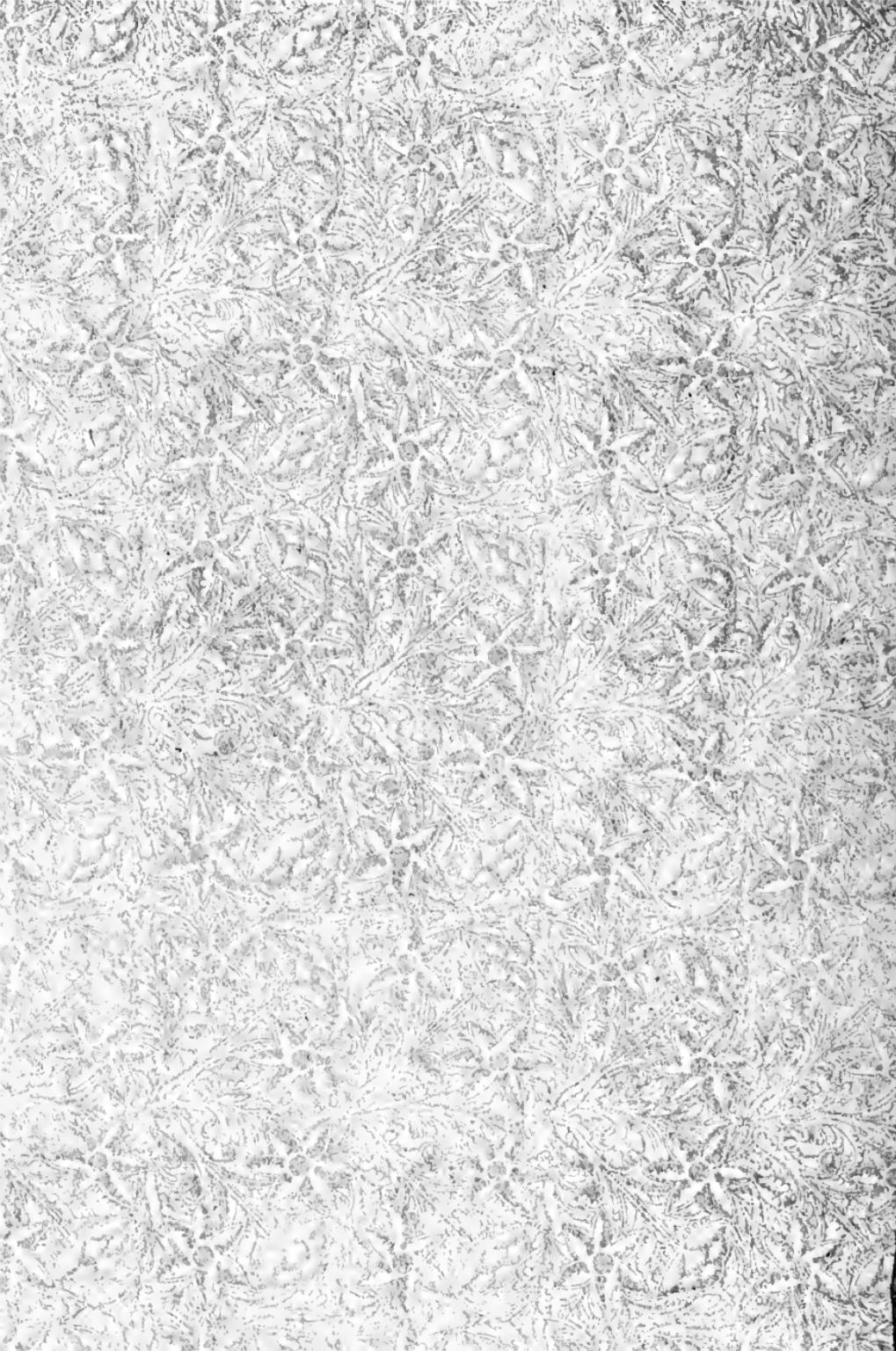
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